

BEAUTIFUL MINECRAFT®



JAMES
DELANEY

**BEAUTIFUL
MINECRAFT®**

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J A M E S D E L A N E Y



**no starch
press**

San Francisco

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20 19 18 17 16 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

ISBN-10: 1-59327-765-2

ISBN-13: 978-1-59327-765-9

Publisher

William Pollock

Developmental Editor

Tyler Ortman

Production Editor

Serena Yang

Proofreader

Riley Hoffman

Cover Builds

Fabergé Palace by Rowan van Tuijl

Azorzeia - Gardens of the Wild

by Andrzej Czerniewski

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For information on distribution, translations, or bulk sales,
please contact No Starch Press, Inc. directly:

No Starch Press, Inc.

245 8th Street, San Francisco, CA 94103

phone: 1.415.863.9900; info@nostarch.com

www.nostarch.com

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016949782

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Thanks to the BlockWorks team
for all of their incredible work, and
a special thanks to Splekh and Nati
for creating all the renders in the book.

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Introduction

by James Delaney

Since the release of Minecraft in 2009, players of all ages and from all backgrounds have spent countless hours using the game to bring their own imaginations to life. They have made Minecraft the most popular computer game of all time. But as Cody Sumter from the MIT Media Lab said, “[Minecraft creator] Notch hasn’t just built a game. He’s tricked 40 million people into learning to use a CAD program.”

Starting off in an almost infinite, automatically generated landscape made entirely from blocks, the player has the ability to destroy and place blocks—with the aim of staying safe from the hostile creatures that roam the Minecraft world. But that’s not the only way to play.

The player’s imagination comes to the forefront in Creative Mode—where players can focus on building, with unlimited resources and without fear of attack from monsters.

Soon after the game’s release, stunning examples of Creative Mode marvels began to appear—for instance, a replica of *Star Trek*’s USS *Enterprise*, scaled to the size of the Minecraft player, all built by hand and undoubtedly the result of hundreds of hours’ work. The sharing of such creations online played a huge role in the success of Minecraft—Mojang famously launched the game with an advertising budget of zero, so community-made content and sharing were central to the growth of the Minecraft phenomenon.

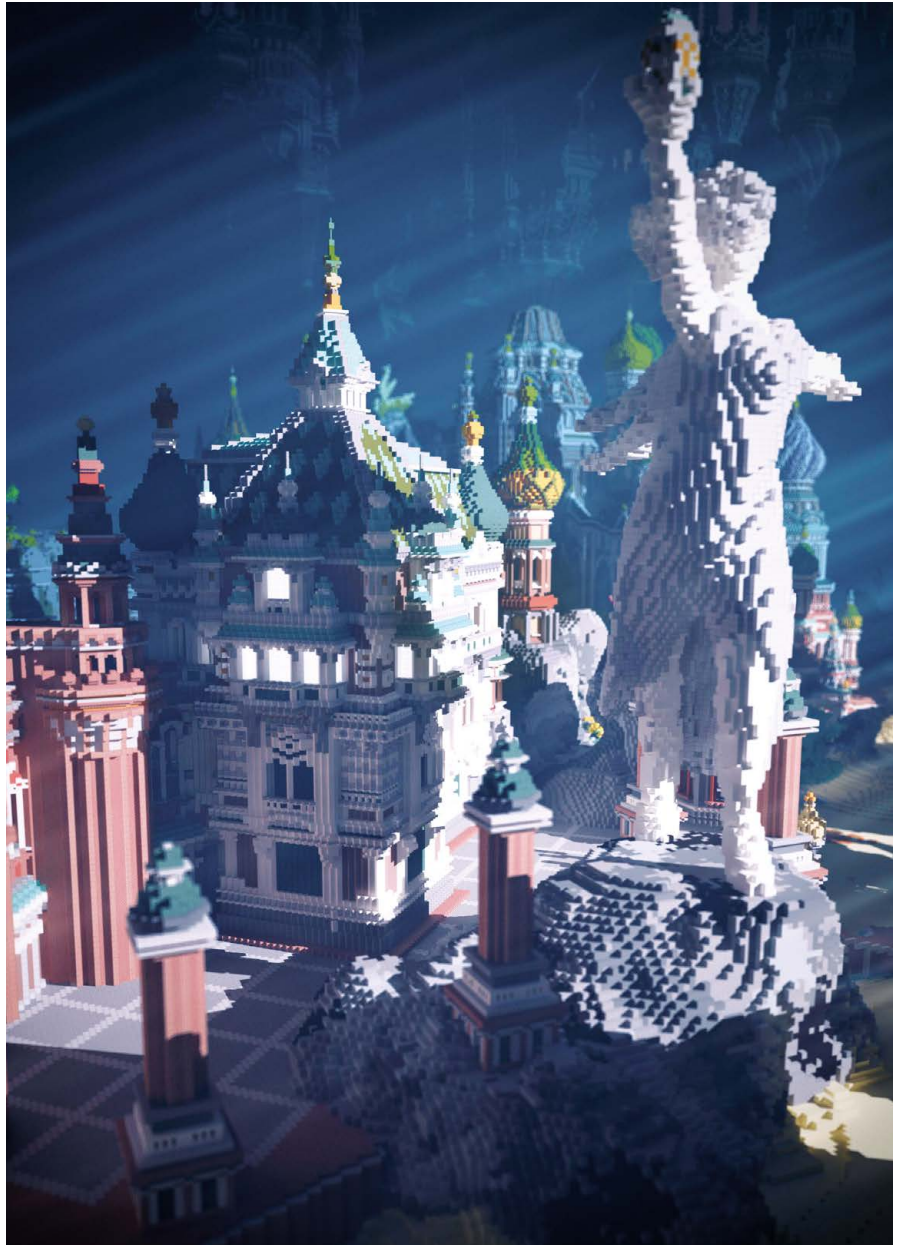
This book assembles some of the Minecraft community’s most impressive work. No collection could ever be considered definitive, but my goal is to showcase a variety, across a broad range of styles, approaches, and themes.

The sculptures and scenes in this book, unlike the USS *Enterprise*, were not entirely built by hand. Custom Minecraft sculpting and design tools have been created to speed up the building process, adding functions such as copying, pasting, rotating, and even “painting”—much like the features of Photoshop. Nevertheless, some of the larger projects, consisting of millions of blocks, are still the product of hundreds of hours of work.

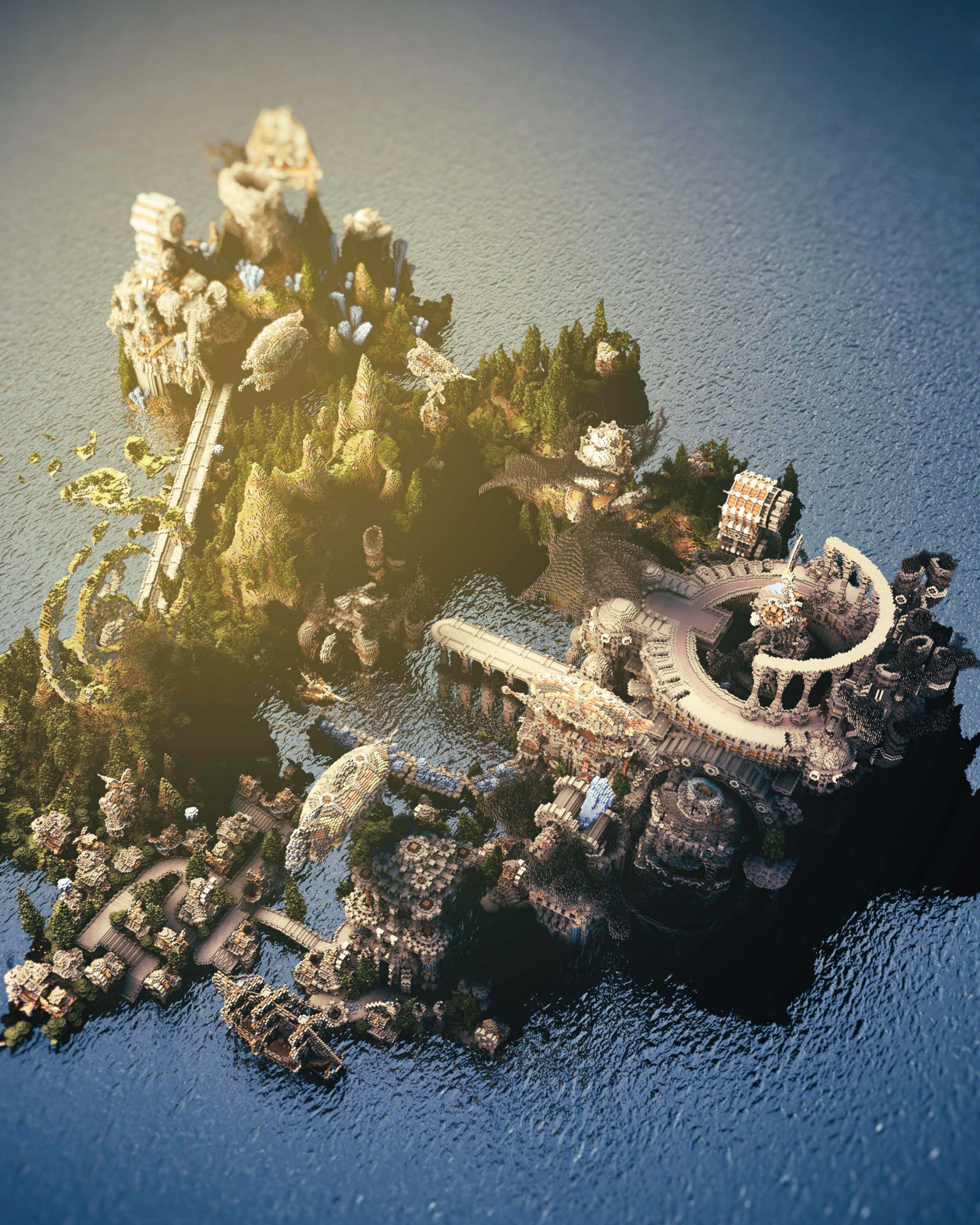
Many of these projects have been completed as commissions for a variety of clients, including Minecraft servers, film studios such as Disney, and many other organizations trying to benefit from Minecraft’s young and enamoured audience.

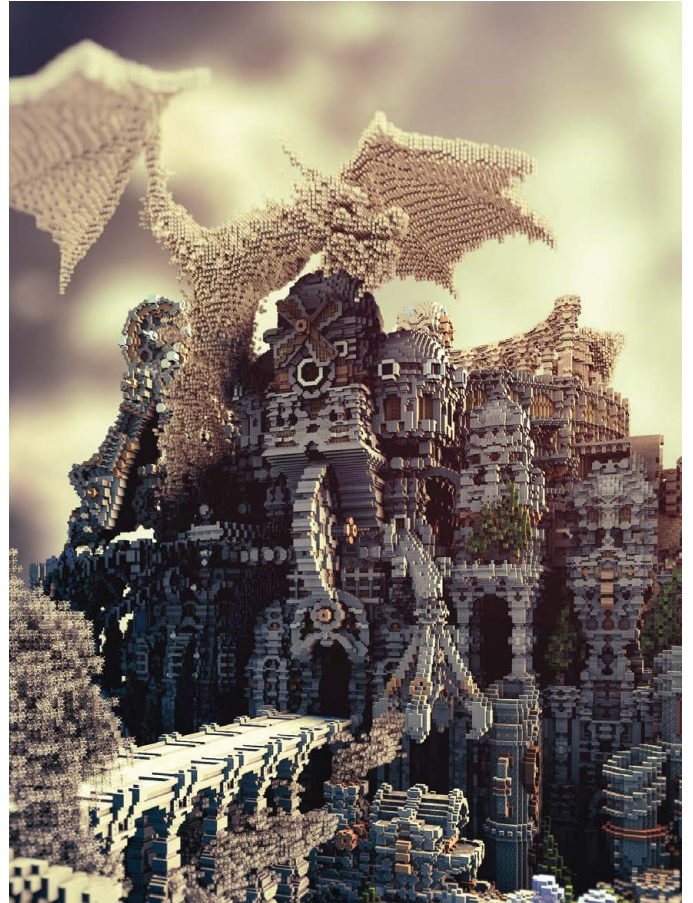
What are the artistic possibilities of creating worlds in Minecraft? This book aims to explore the furthest limits of this question and to let the artists themselves explain their motivations for creating art in this unlikely medium.

Fantasy Worlds

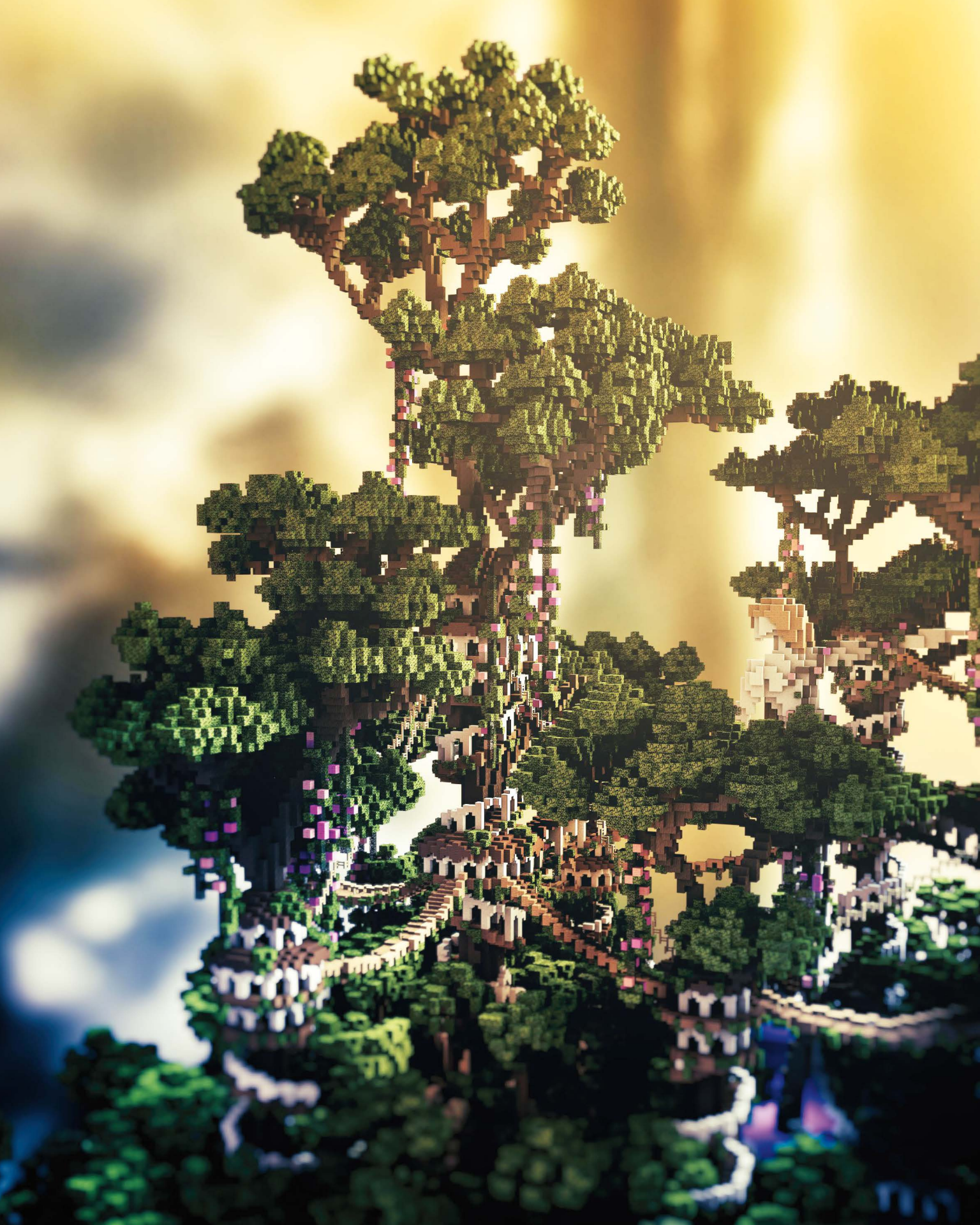








(opposite and above)
Sean Davidson's *Evorium, The Cloud Conjurer* (2014)
3 builders | 33 million blocks | 29 days



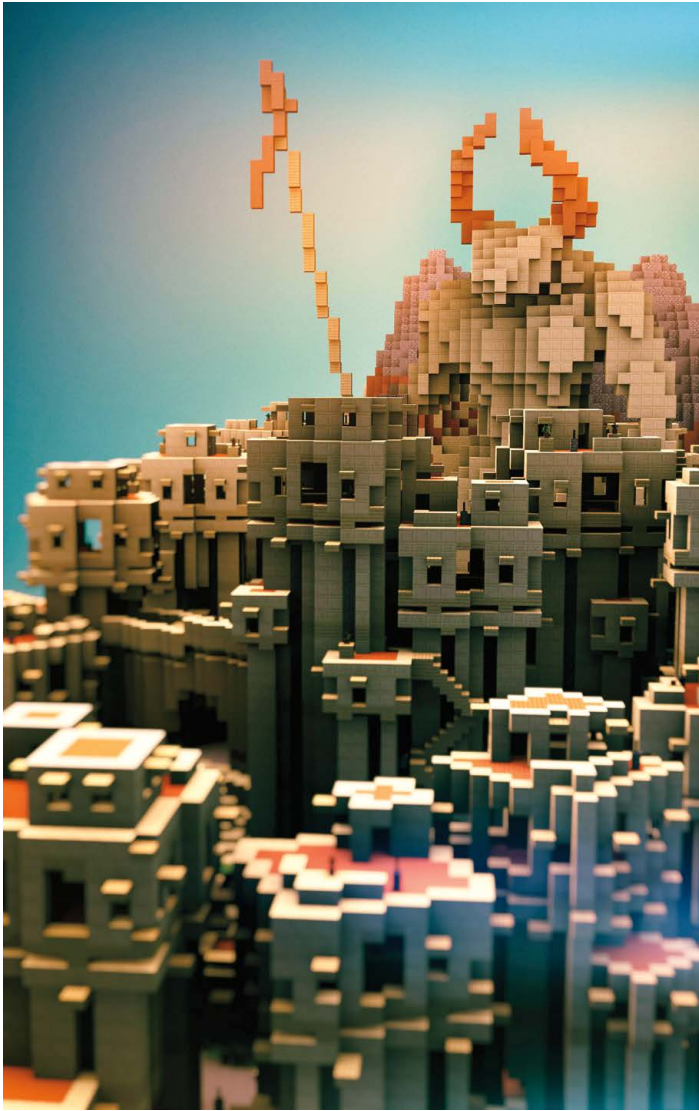


(opposite)
Nickolas Morton's *Arboris* (2014)
1 builder | 1 million blocks | 35 days

(above)
Will Loader's *Smuggler's Cove* (2016)
1 builder | 9 million blocks | 18 days



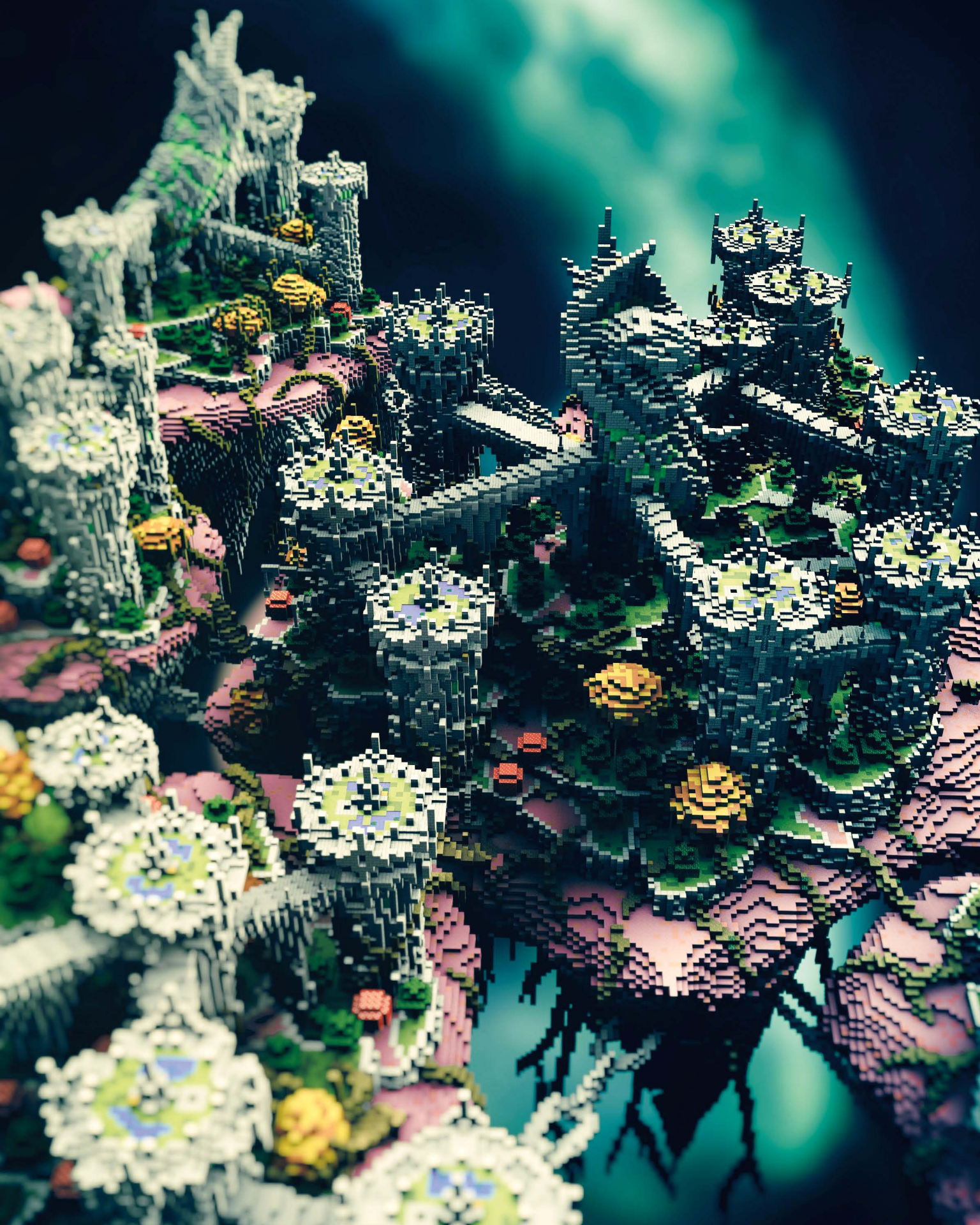




(left)
 Nickolas Morton's *Minos* (2014)
 1 builder | 500 thousand blocks | 35 days

(right)
 Nickolas Morton's *Coliseum* (2014)
 1 builder | 2 million blocks | 18 days

(opposite)
 The BlockWorks Team's *The Mad God Realm* (2013)
 4 builders | 10 million blocks | 21 days





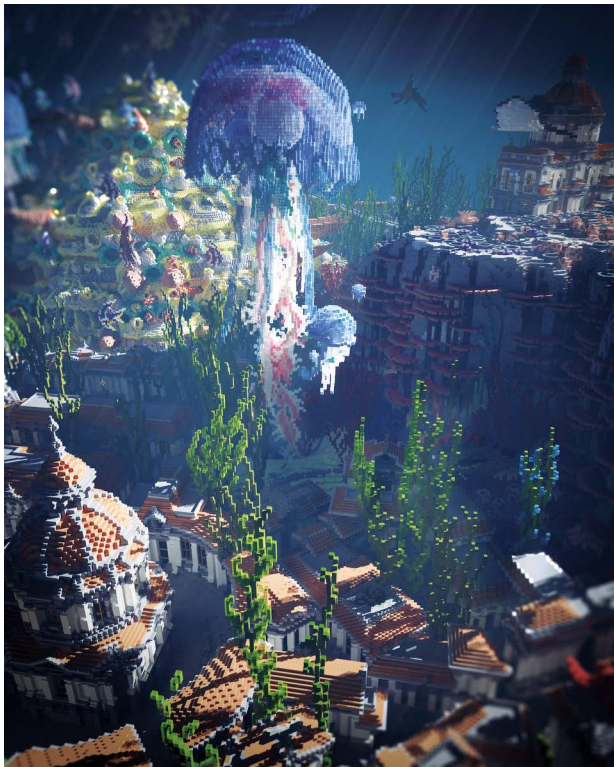
(above)
John Corbin Rainbolt's *The Soldier's Tale* (2016)
1 builder | 20 million blocks | 50 days







(opposite and above)
Rowan van Tuijl's *Flores* (2014)
1 builder | 10 million blocks | 50 days



(above)
The Pandora's Blocks Team's *Xephira, Essence of the Tide* (2015)
10 builders | 42 million blocks | 29 days

(opposite)
The BlockWorks Team's *Neverland* (2014)
5 builders | 14 million blocks | 7 days



The Builds of Tomorrow

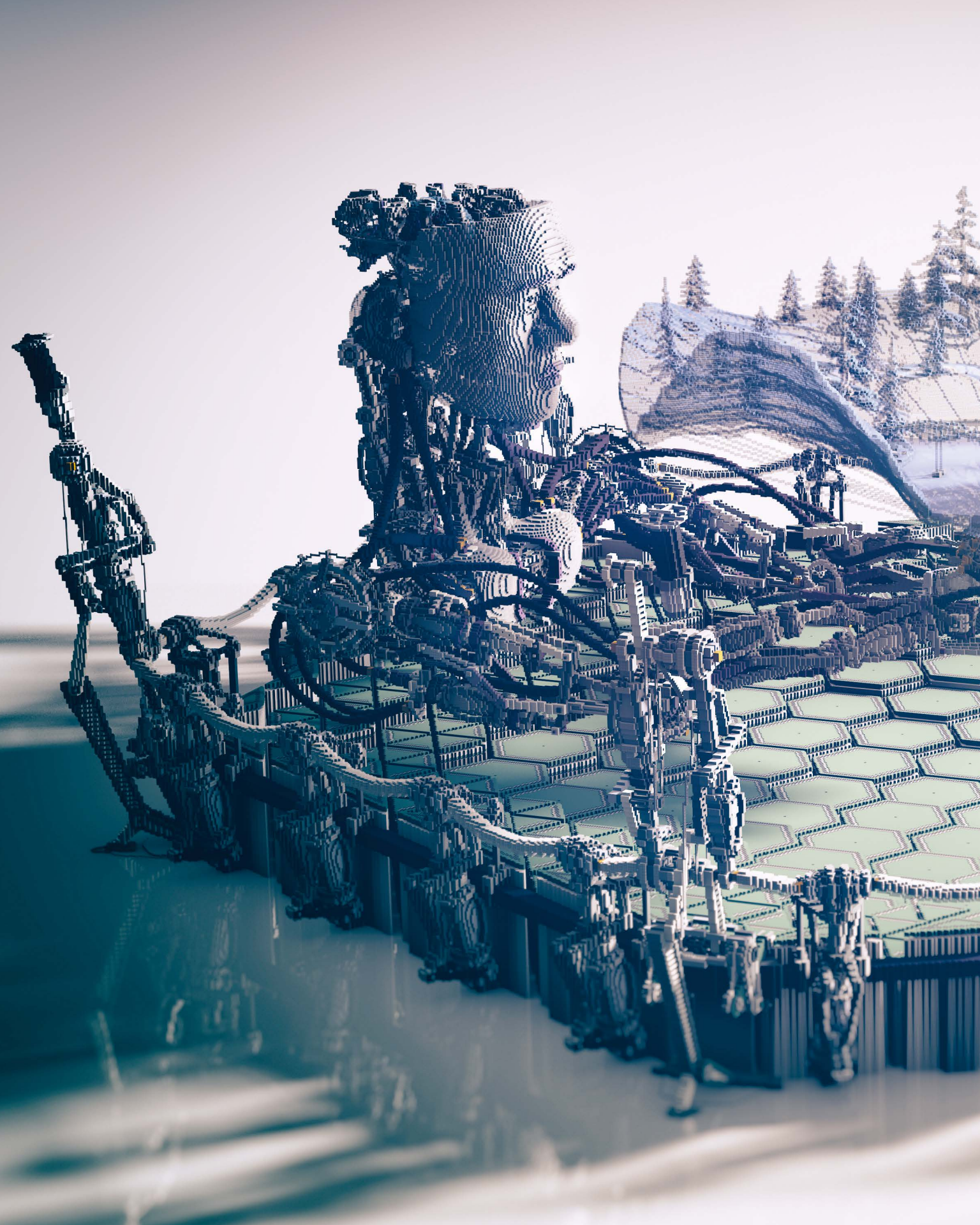


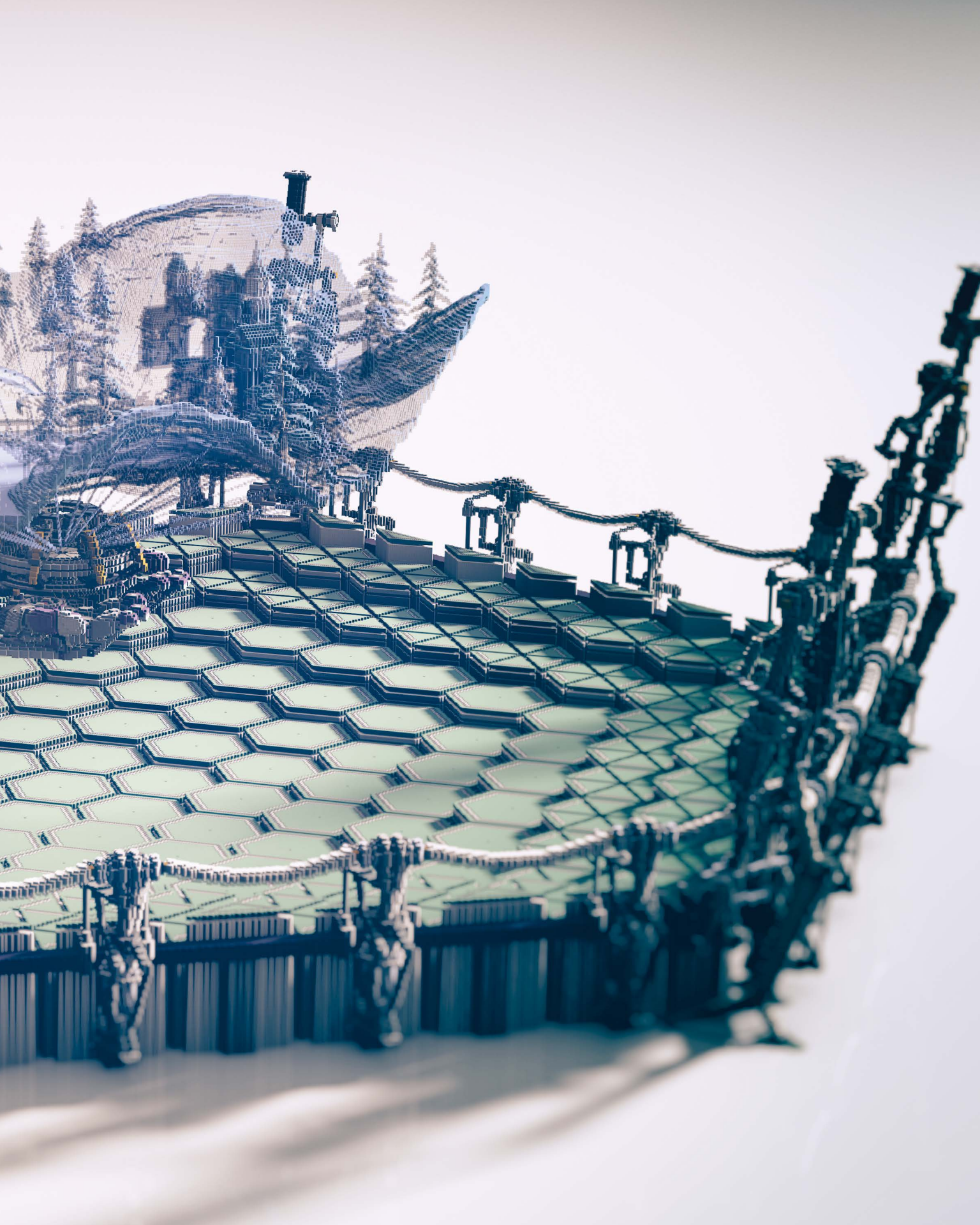
(above)
Nickolas Morton's *Minotaur Battlecruiser* (2015)
1 builder | 1 million blocks | 34 days

(opposite)
Nickolas Morton's *Andromeda* (2014)
1 builder | 1 million blocks | 34 days

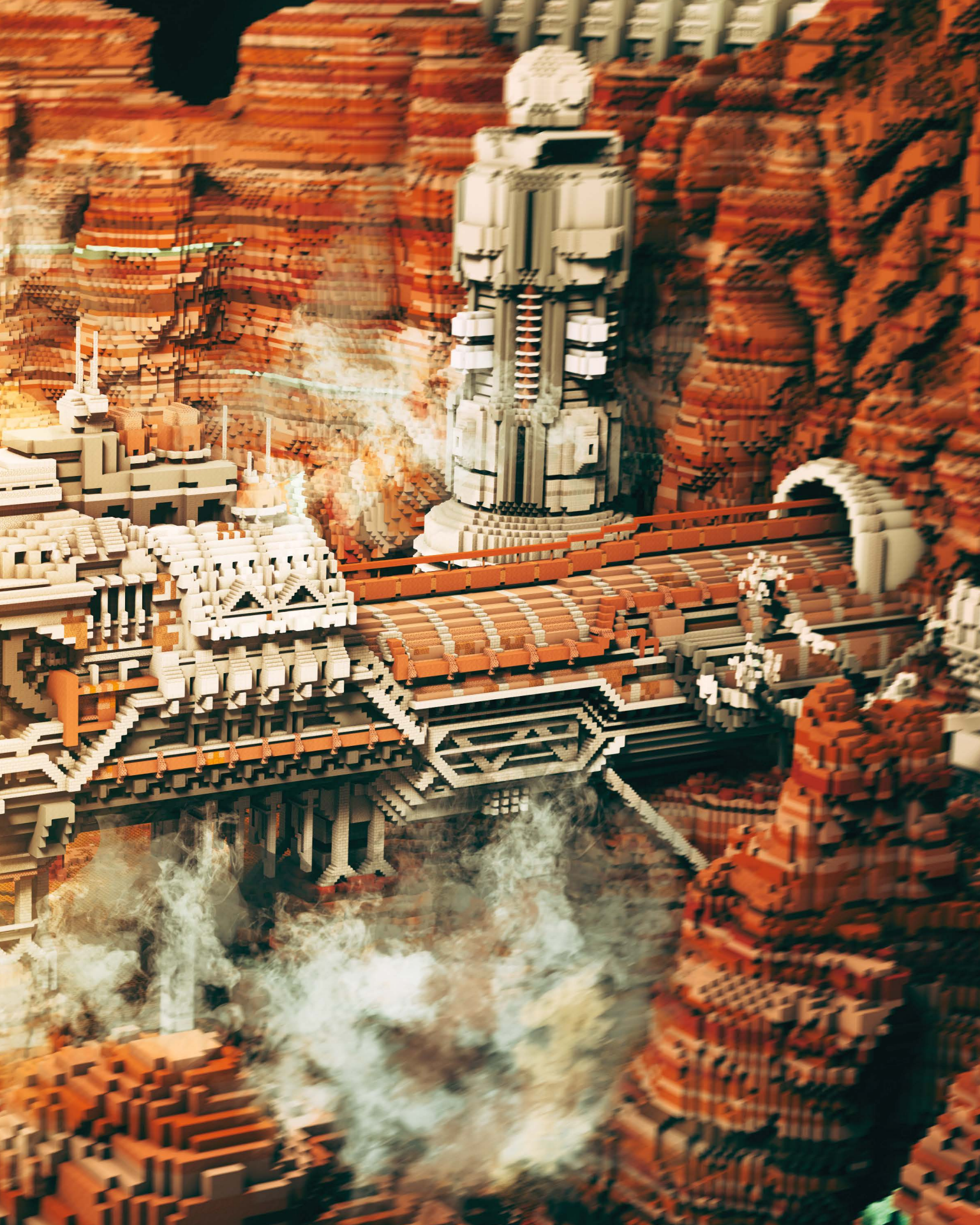
(next page)
Will Loader's *A Futuristic Past* (2016)
1 builder | 9 million blocks | 28 days











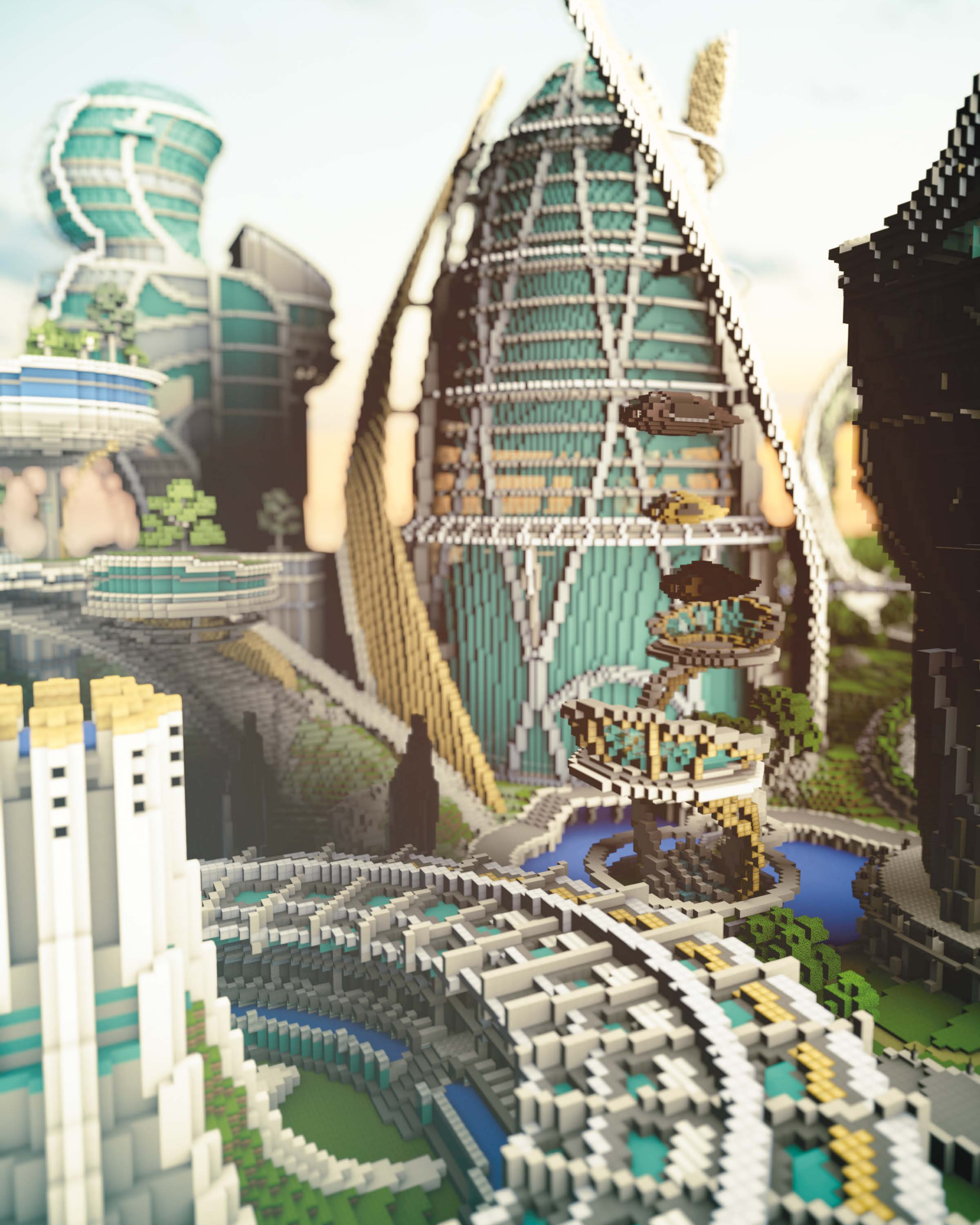


(previous page)

The BlockWorks Team's *Code Red* (2016)
5 builders | 30 million blocks | 2 days

(above, opposite, and next page)

The BlockWorks Team's *Tomorrowland* (2015)
8 builders | 100 million blocks | 7 days







More Than a Game

by Kristen Kodama



While Minecraft was still in beta, I played for hours in single-player Survival Mode—I was content with building villages in complete solitude. It was nearly a year before I joined my first public multiplayer Minecraft server. I soon learned what I had been missing out on and became involved as both a player and a moderator.

At the same time, I was busy obtaining a degree in interactive media studies, learning about web development and graphic design. Playing Minecraft was simply a hobby. Yet I always managed to make the time to return to the game, even though school would drag me away. To the chagrin of some of my professors, I took every opportunity to incorporate Minecraft into my projects, from creating a Minecraft music video to giving a lecture on commodification in Minecraft.

I became a member of BlockWorks in March 2014 after being invited to join the team. The build that caught their attention was a sculpture of a giant octopus—which also happened to be my first attempt at sculpting organics. I was overwhelmed by their praise—I had become used to the competitiveness of the graphic design world, where you have to struggle every day to get commissioned (or even noticed!).

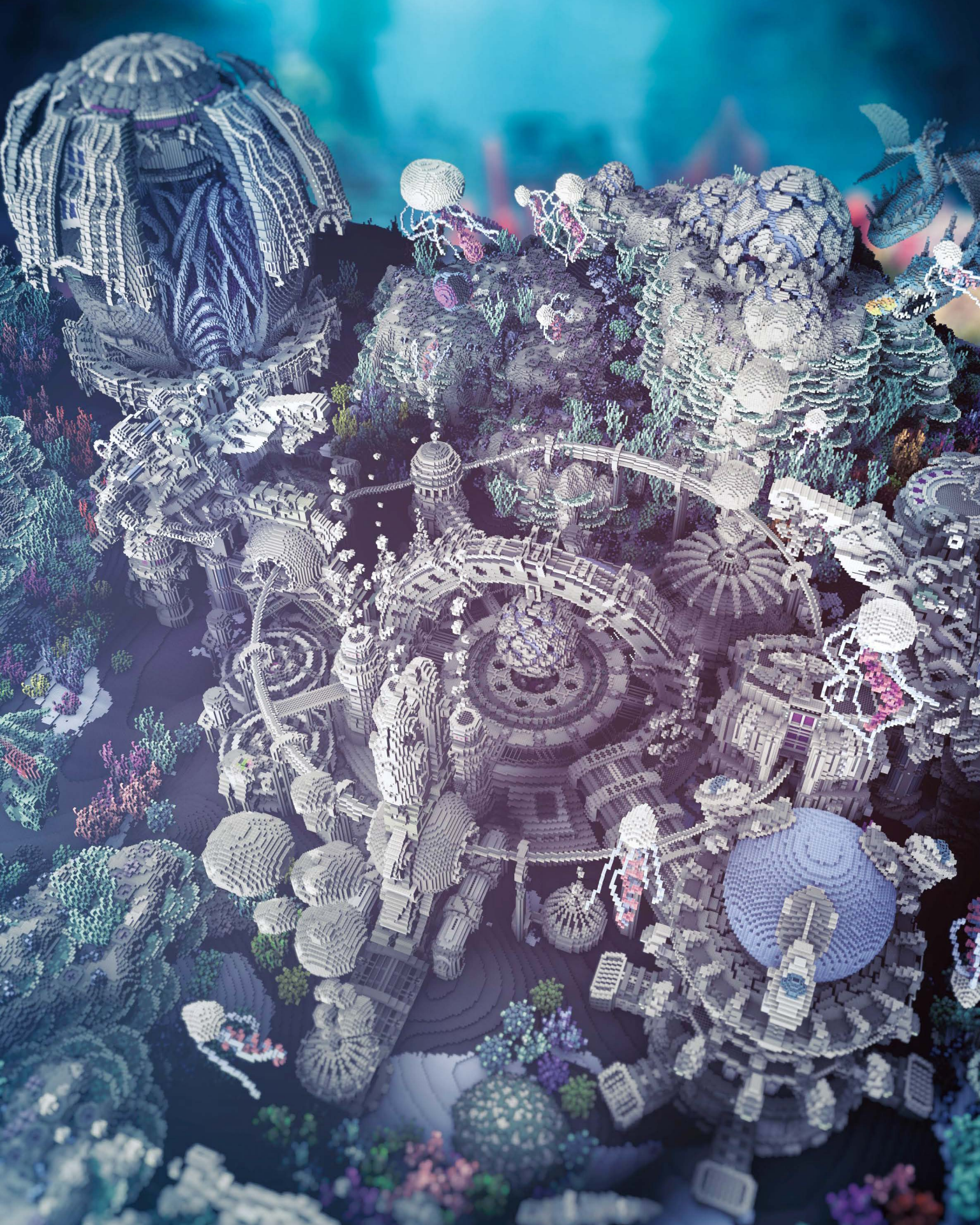
The BlockWorks server became a place where I could express myself creatively while receiving direct and genuine feedback from my fellow artists. Everyone on the team understood the importance of constructive criticism in creating a successful piece. Of course, not every design works out as planned. I keep my old works, even those that are incomplete or “atrocious.” I learn from my mistakes and take heart in how I’ve improved over time—and I revisit my old concepts for new inspiration.

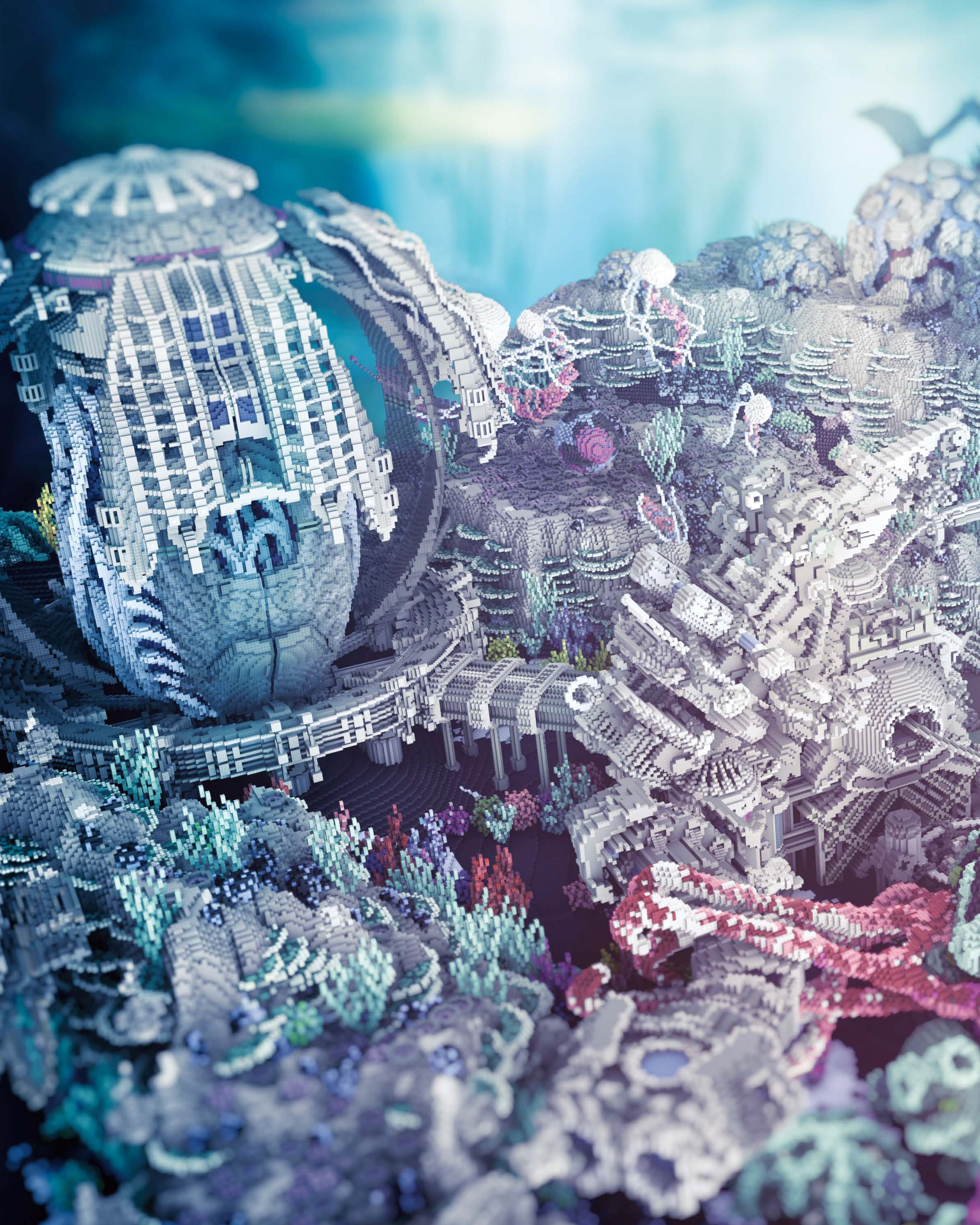
Out of all of my Minecraft projects, the giant wall of text is easily my favorite, as I’ve always had a love for typography. While creating fonts is entertaining, the challenge emerges in re-creating a font at a fraction of the size while retaining its original character. But to a designer, a challenge becomes a reason to innovate.

Minecraft has developed into something more than a game. It has become a medium for artists, designers, architects, developers, and more to express themselves. The Minecraft world has become my canvas, and I’ll continue to place blocks to my heart’s content.

(opposite and next page)

The BlockWorks Team’s *Deep Sea* (2015)
9 builders | 32 million blocks | 6 days











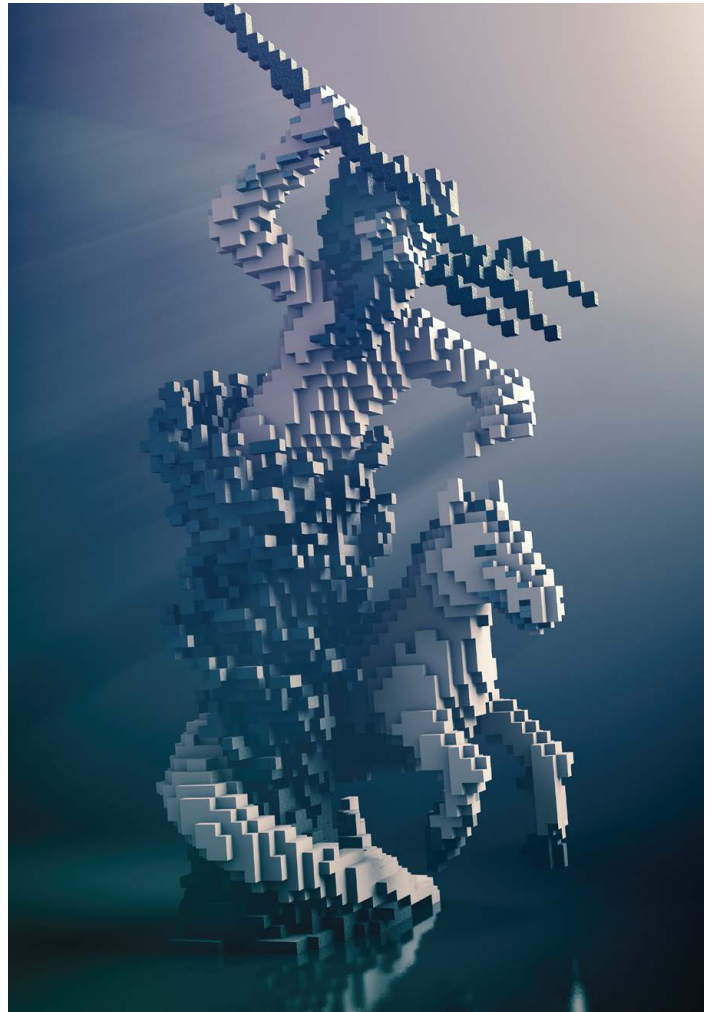
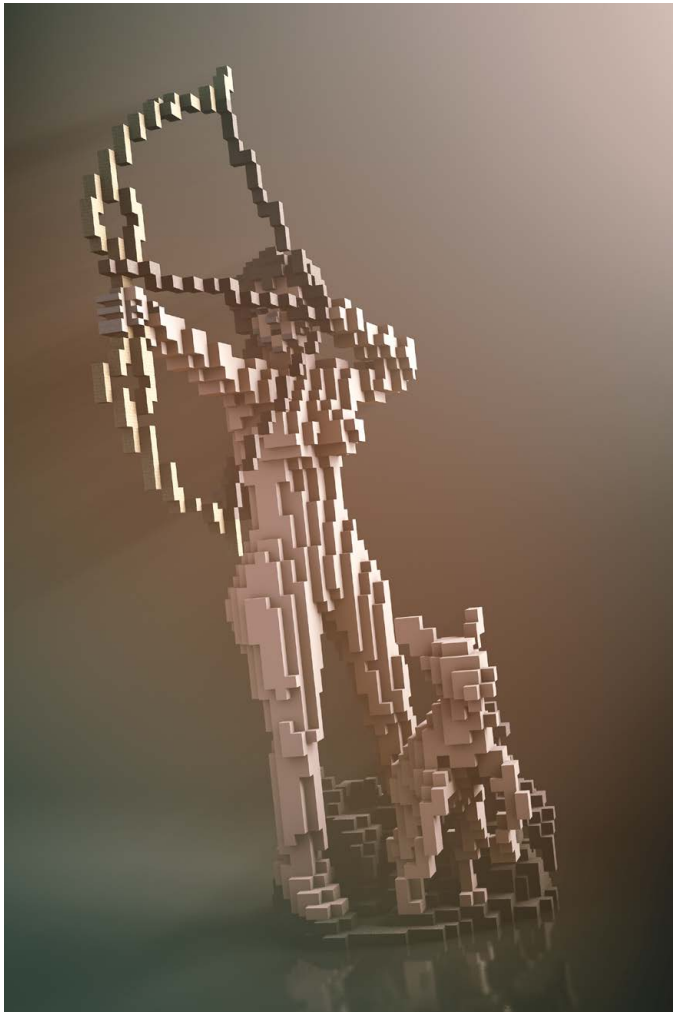
(opposite and above)
The BlockWorks Team's *Ireland 2066* (2016)
16 builders | 100 million blocks | 4 days



(above and opposite)
The BlockWorks Team's *Climate Hope City* (2015)
5 builders | 70 million blocks | 6 days



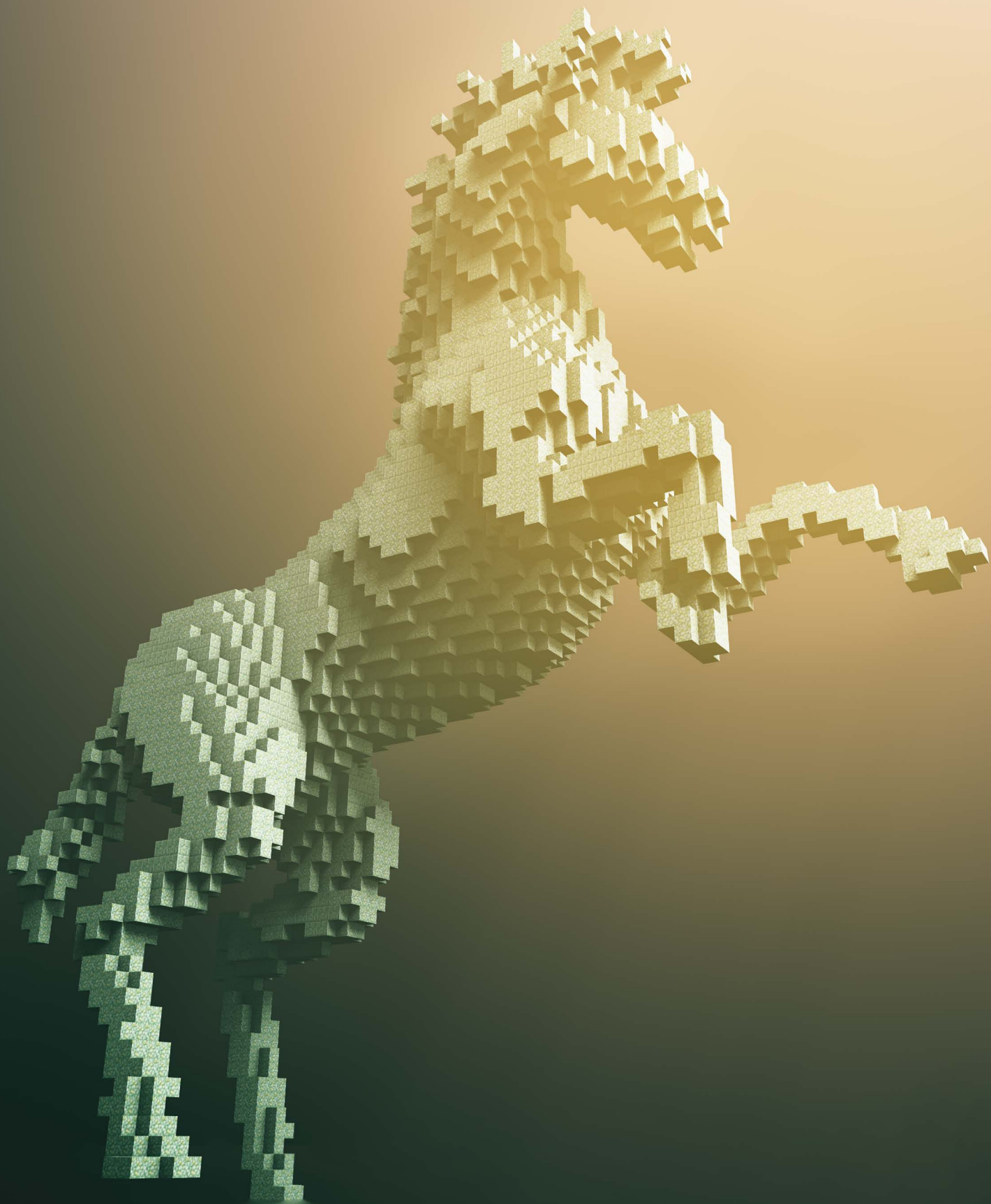
Sculptures



(left)
Matthias Meier zu Verl's *Artemis* (2014)
1 builder | 6 thousand blocks | 1 day

(right)
Matthias Meier zu Verl's *Poseidon* (2014)
1 builder | 13 thousand blocks | 6 days

(opposite)
Nickolas Morton's *Horse* (2015)
1 builder | 9 thousand blocks | 2 days







(opposite and above)
Paul Fuchs's *Phaloria* (2015)
1 builder | 500 thousand blocks | 12 days



(above)

Paul Fuchs's *Cthulhu* (2015)

1 builder | 100 thousand blocks | 14 days

(opposite)

Nickolas Morton's *Ferelden Frostback* (2015)

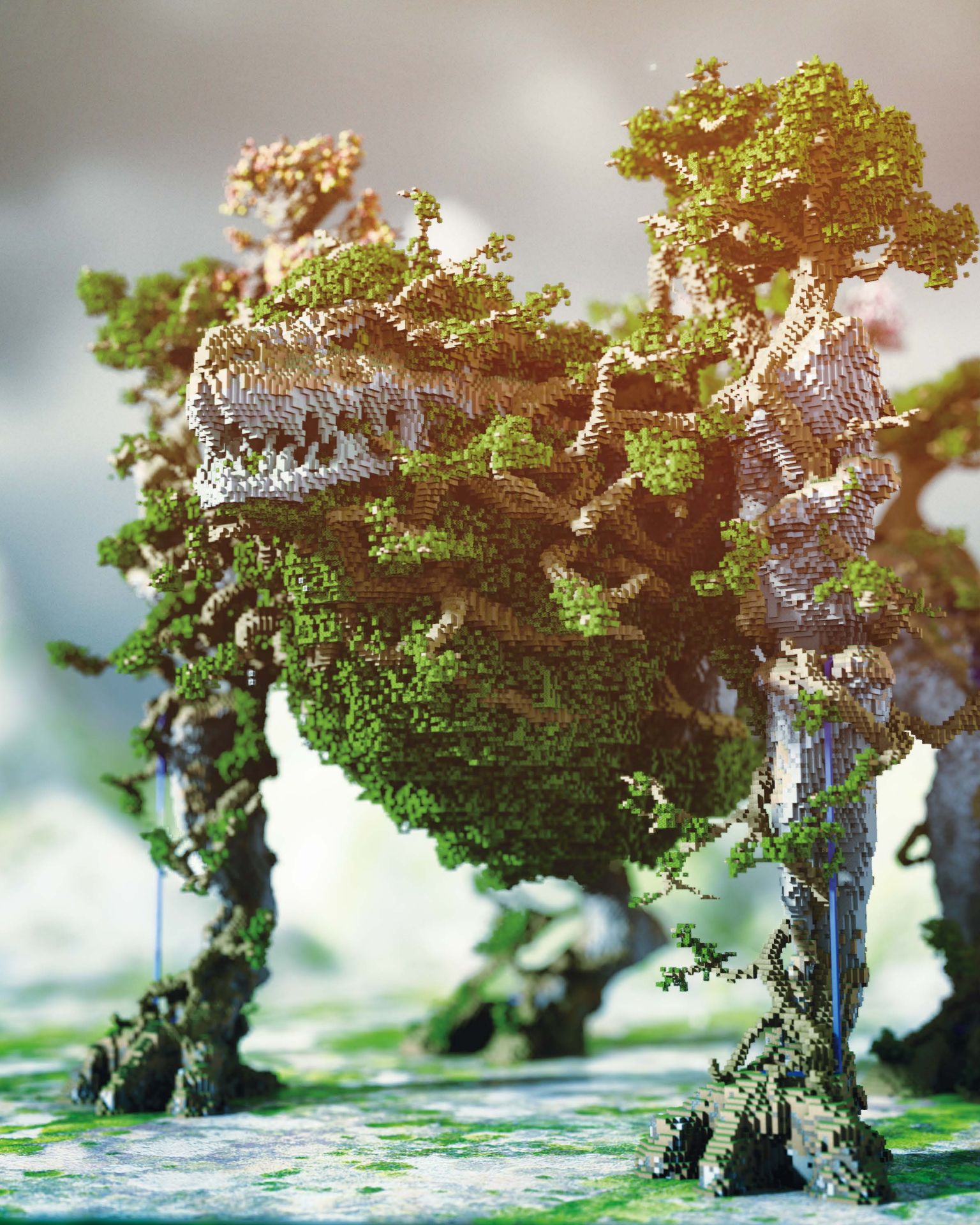
1 builder | 375 thousand blocks | 41 days





(above)
Will Loader's *Tamashi Kyaria - Carrier of Souls* (2014)
1 builder | 5 million blocks | 50 days

(opposite)
Nash S.'s *Omega of the Ancients* (2015)
1 builder | 200 thousand blocks | 11 days



Building a Place in the World

by Matthew Busch

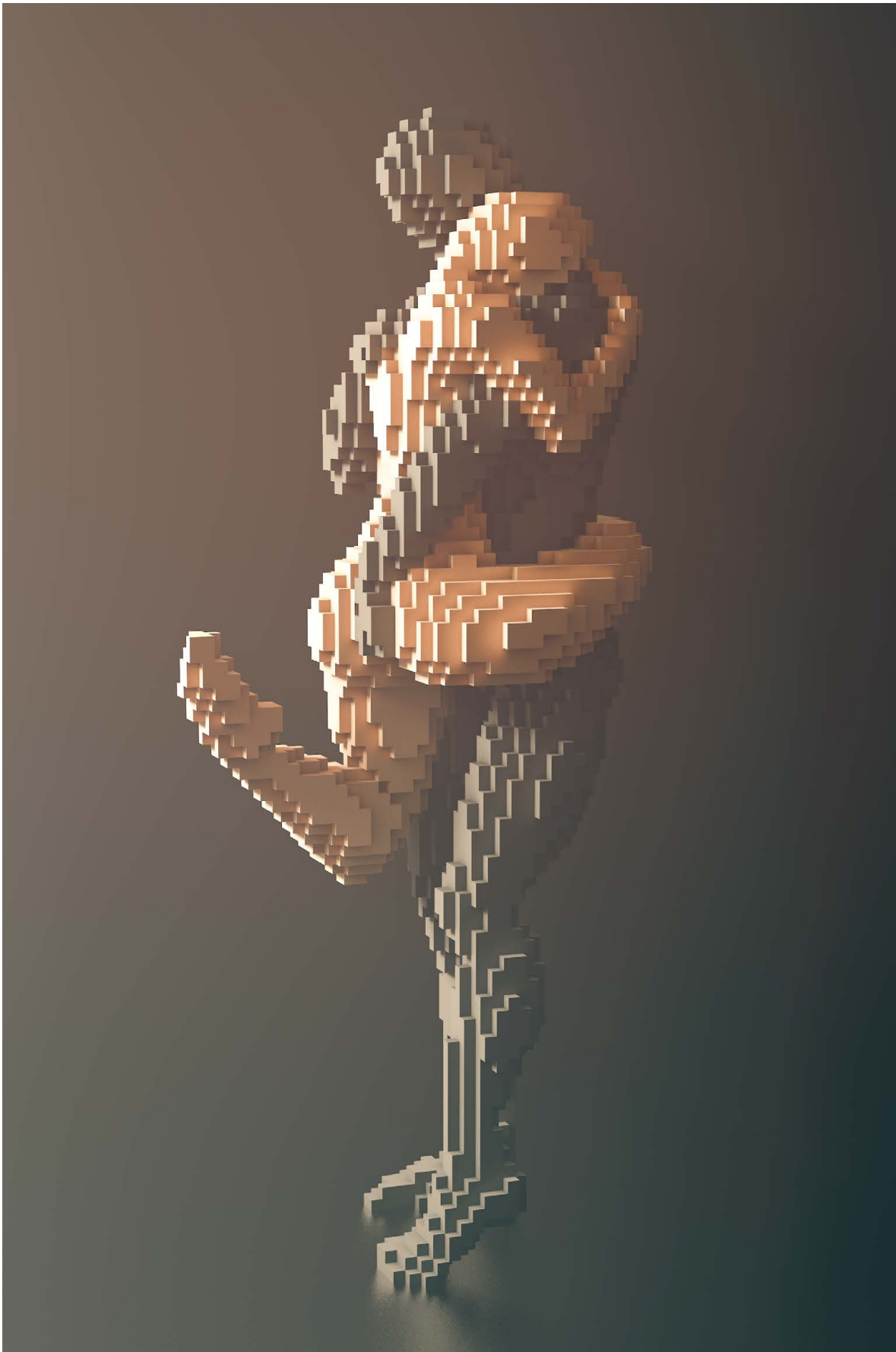


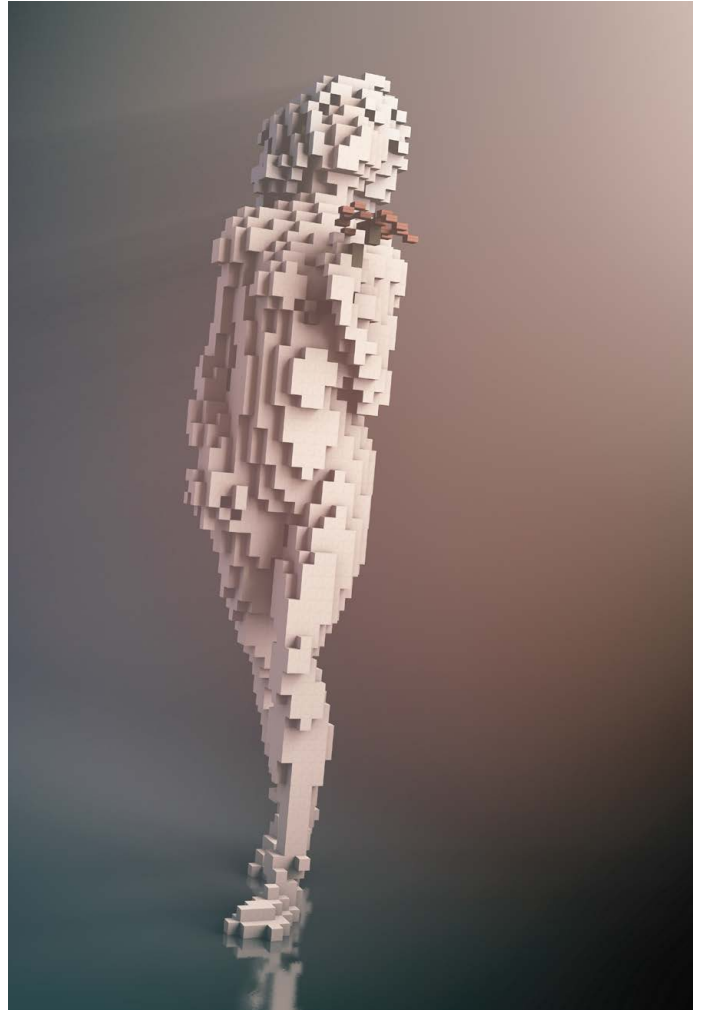
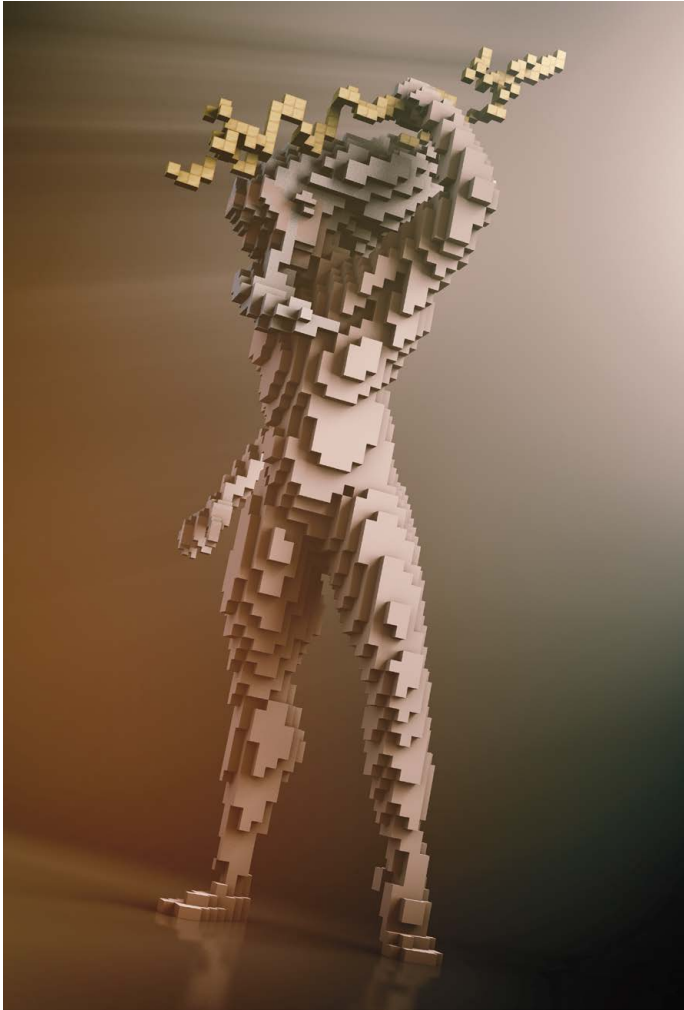
When I logged on to my first creative Minecraft server, my mission was to escape reality. I was a creative person, but writing and making music had grown tiresome. I needed something new to divert the creative flow. I thought to myself, "I'll try to make some of the ideas in my head."

Blocks in hand, I started building on a small plot of green grass, trying to impress the server's admins. When they liked my abstract alien spacecraft, they asked me to build in the main world. There, I carved a canyon in the desert before laying the roots of a colossal tree stump. Then I built a strange curvaceous mansion in the tundra. These were visions I had carried for years.

All of a sudden, I realized that days had passed, and months had passed, and I had clicked them away. Minecraft had become an addiction. So I asked myself, "Is what I'm creating worth the time I've spent?" But the creative community blossomed, builds grew more beautiful, and my skills were increasingly challenged. I still wondered what it would all amount to, as I stooped over a screen, creating imaginary worlds while the real world passed me by.

The predominant style at the time was architectural, but my attempts were always abstract, leaning toward the organic. I embraced my style. I remembered the countless character sketches I had made in other mediums. I decided I would sculpt my characters in Minecraft. I would build living beings. And so I did for about a year.

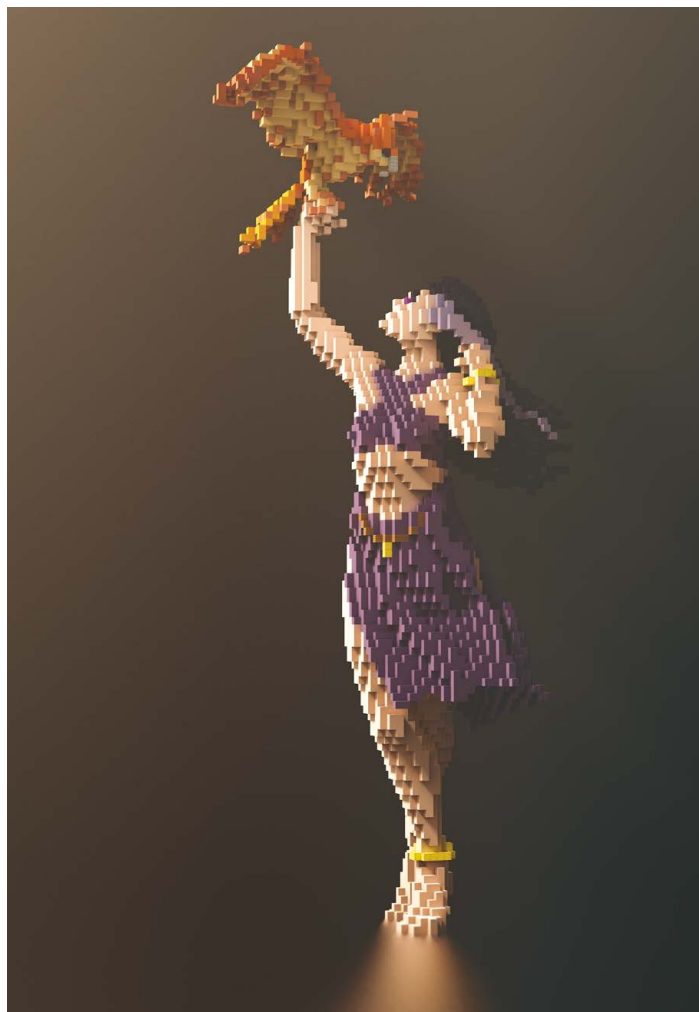




(left)
Matthew Busch's *Zeus* (2014)
1 builder | 6 thousand blocks | 1 day

(right)
Matthew Busch's *Aphrodite* (2014)
1 builder | 4 thousand blocks | 1 day

I studied anatomy little by little, observed my own musculature and movement, and tried to make my creatures move. Now I had a niche. People began to recognize me for what I did. I was hailed as one of the best “organics” builders in the community. But soon, even my best statues were eclipsed. I became aware of builders who had sculpted creatures far more majestic than mine. One of these builders was Nickolas Morton (Block_Fortress); another, Ymgarl. It was a strange feeling, looking up to them. I did not feel overawed like I had by the great writers and musicians. I wanted to reach their level. I wanted to share my work with them and say, “You inspired me.” At that point, I started to realize what Minecraft really was to me—an incubator for my confidence as a creator. It was teaching me to learn, strive, and take what was mine.



(above)
Matthew Busch's *Rise of Nature* (2016)
1 builder | 5 thousand blocks | 1 day

Having taken these lessons to heart and having burned my eyes out in front of the screen, I prepared to say good-bye to Minecraft in the summer of 2014. I was twenty-four, and I needed to make money. That was when James Delaney from BlockWorks approached me with an invitation. He had been so impressed by a sculpture of mine that he wanted me to apply for his team. Build teams had generally turned me off—they reeked of elitism—but Nickolas Morton was a part of this one. I could finally meet him. And as I looked at BlockWorks’s projects, I saw that their shapes were good. I liked their style. Maybe I could somehow make money and continue to improve my craft. Projects poured in: statues of gods for a Greek-themed server hub, cute critters for a *Peter Pan* spawn, personal projects. And I was getting paid. Since when did you get paid for Minecraft? When I told my friends—even other builders—some of them hardly believed me.

As BlockWorks gained manpower and the Minecraft industry expanded, our clients became more illustrious and the standards for my work were raised. I even taught sculpting master classes at the Minecraft Builders Convention. Since when did people take classes to learn about a game? But we all knew by then that Minecraft was no longer a game—not to us. It was a medium. We worked like architects, graphic designers, 3D modelers, and sculptors would. Indeed, many of us worked in these professions, and we held the game to real-world standards. The line between the game and life was blurring.

When I started playing Minecraft, I was not strong enough for the real world, but I was strong enough for the game. The game has made me braver, more confident, more proactive, and more willing to try new things and push my limits. I don’t regret falling into addiction. Minecraft has given me a little more faith that the world is an enormous, wondrous, and welcoming place, filled with opportunities for everyone.



Mechanical Marvels





(opposite top)
Carlos Batalla's *Agamemnon* (2013)
1 builder | 1 million blocks | 40 days

(opposite bottom)
Carlos Batalla's *Atropos* (2014)
1 builder | 1 million blocks | 40 days

(above)
Carlos Batalla's *Centurion* (2015)
1 builder | 1 million blocks | 40 days



(above and opposite)
The BlockWorks Team's *Battersea* (2013)
2 builders | 3 million blocks | 8 days



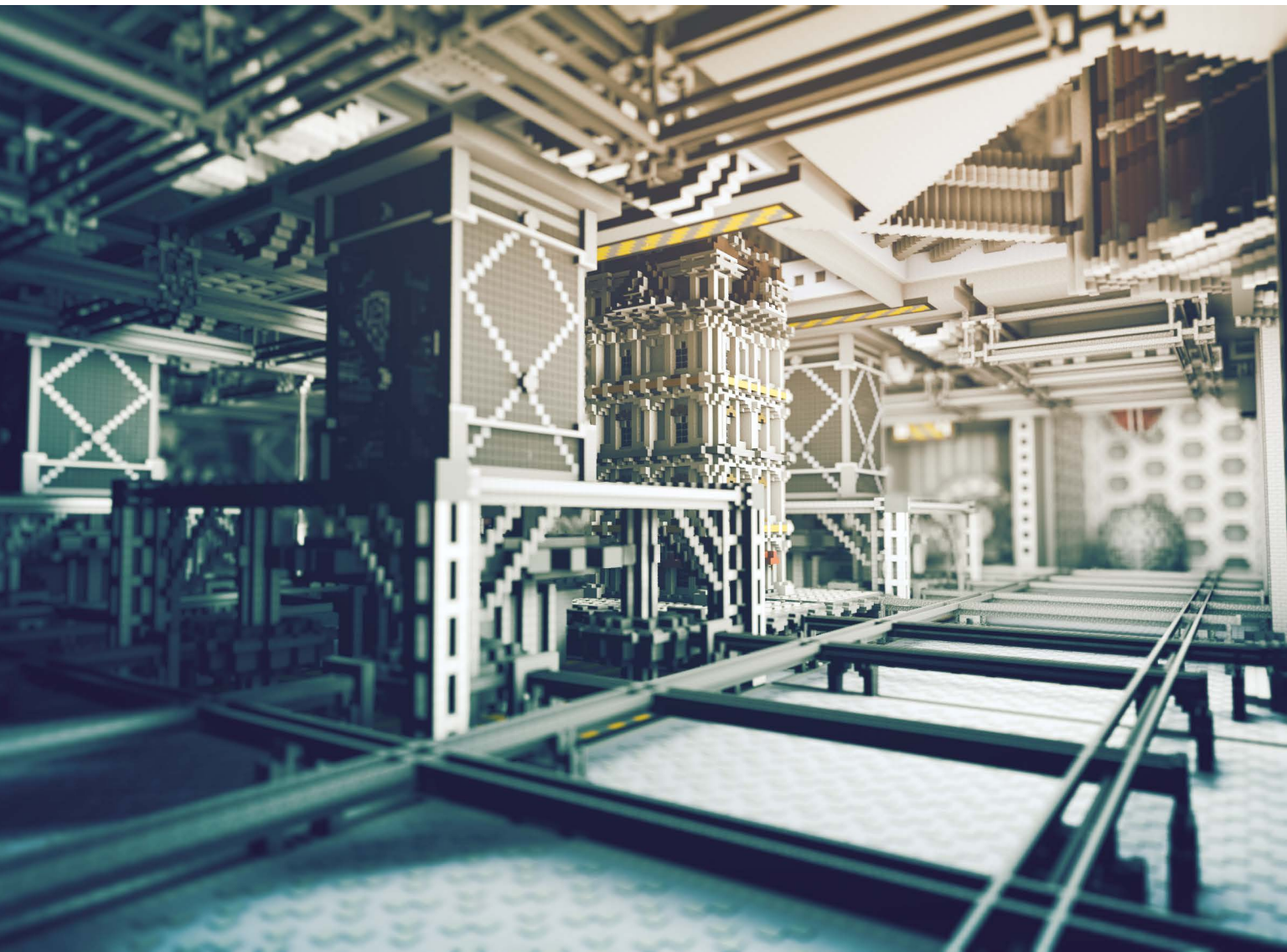




(opposite and above)
The BlockWorks Team's *The Pit* (2013)
9 builders | 30 million blocks | 6 days





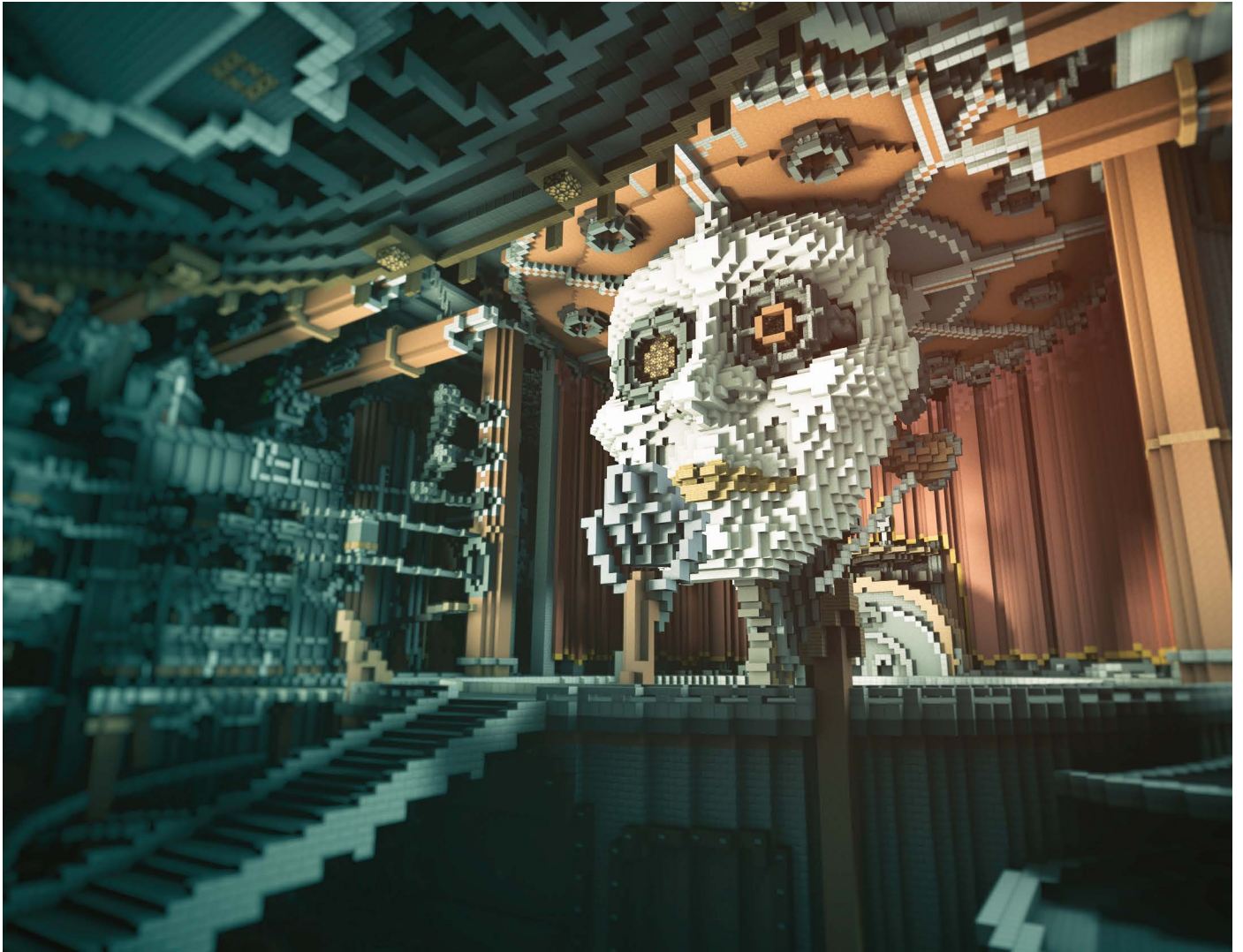


(previous page and above)
The BlockWorks Team's *BlockWorks Inc.* (2013)
7 builders | 100 million blocks | 20 days



(above)
The BlockWorks Team's *Aeternium* (2013)
15 builders | 100 million blocks | 7 days





(opposite and above)
The BlockWorks Team's *Aeternium* (2013)
15 builders | 100 million blocks | 7 days



(above and opposite)
 Vincent Grenfeldt's *Mr. Ratoyo's Moving Toystore* (2016)
 1 builder | 3 million blocks | 60 days

(next page)
 Vegard Elseth's *Lindblum Gate* (2015)
 1 builder | 300 thousand blocks | 60 days







Re-creations



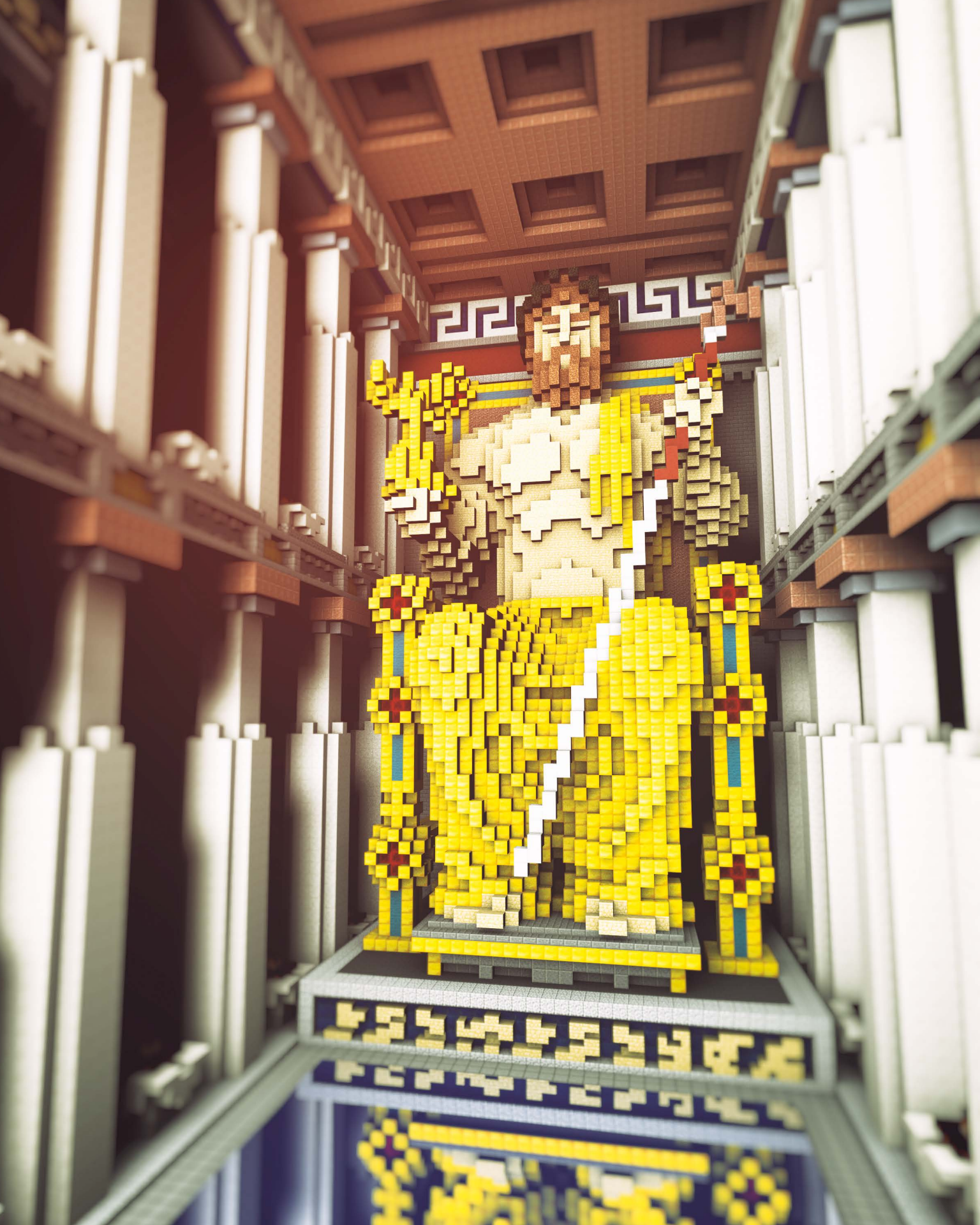
(above)

The BlockWorks Team's *TempleCraft* (2015)
1 builder | 90 thousand blocks | 4 days

(opposite)

Cedric Parsons's *Mausoleum of Halicarnassus* (2016)
1 builder | 44 thousand blocks | 1 day







(opposite)
The BlockWorks Team's *Statue of Zeus at Olympia* (2016)
2 builders | 26 thousand blocks | 2 days

(above)
The BlockWorks Team's *Temple of Zeus* (2016)
2 builders | 530 thousand blocks | 3 days



(left)
Cedric Parsons's *Lighthouse of Alexandria* (2016)
1 builder | 56 thousand blocks | 1 day

(right)
The BlockWorks Team's *Temple of Artemis* (2016)
2 builders | 283 thousand blocks | 1 day

(opposite)
Vanessa Pearson's *Hanging Gardens of Babylon* (2016)
1 builder | 261 thousand blocks | 5 days

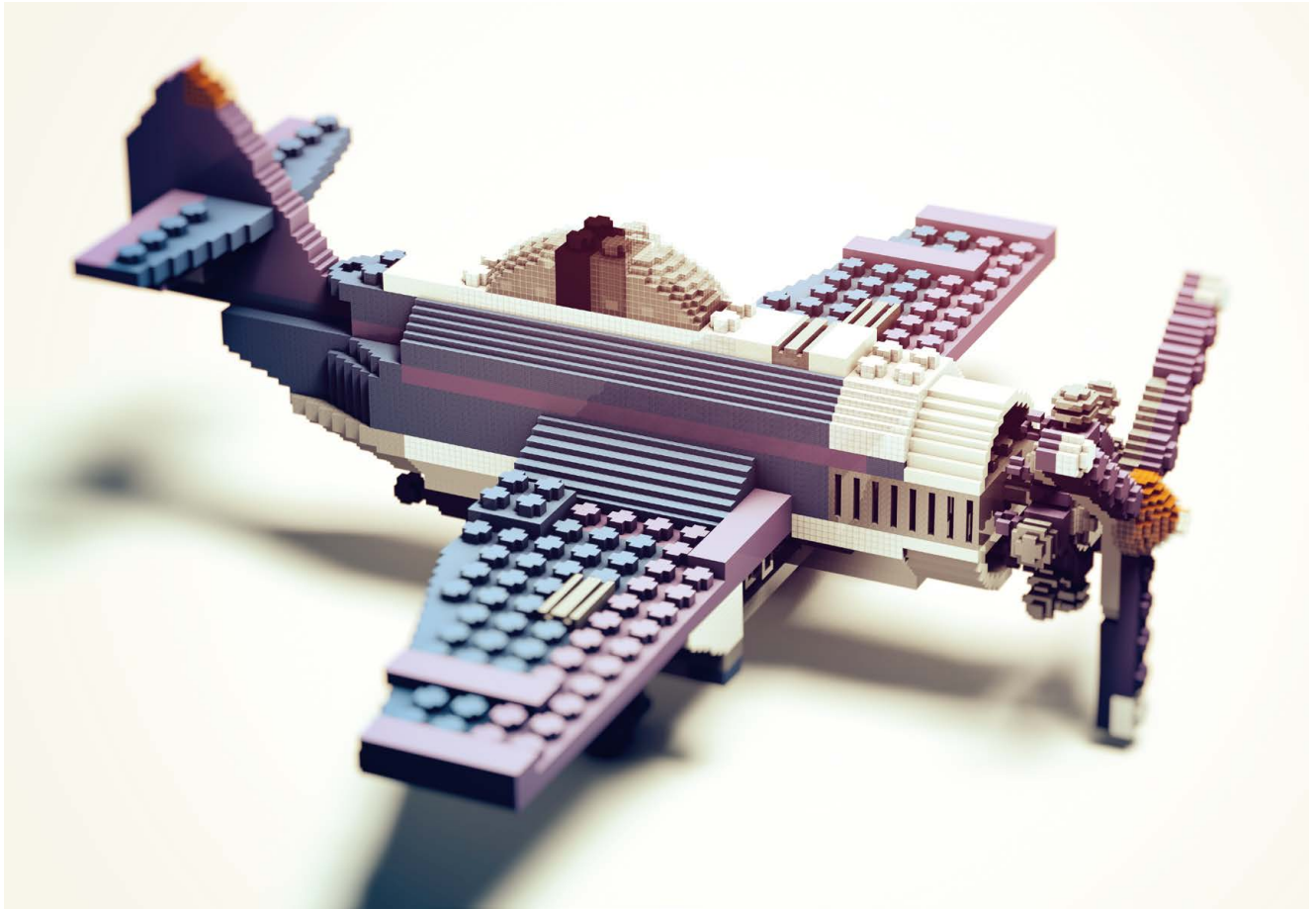
(next page)
Luke Johnson's *Notre Dame* (2016)
1 builder | 6 million blocks | 31 days











(opposite)
Nickolas Morton's *Flying Dutchman* (2016)
1 builder | 245 thousand blocks | 34 days

(above)
Will Loader's *LEGO Plane* (2015)
1 builder | 175 thousand blocks | 5 days





(above)
Nickolas Morton's *White House* (2014)
1 builder | 200 thousand blocks | 34 days

Playful Design

by James Delaney



How can such a simple game capture audiences from around the world, becoming the world's most popular computer game? A game that, at its height, sold more than 50,000 copies per day? What can explain that, when Minecraft has no brilliant graphics to boast of, no narrative, and little of the fast-paced violent action that is now a mainstay of modern combat games?

Simply put, Minecraft provides creative opportunity. Players don't enter a pre-built, ordered, and restricted world; instead they enter a limitless virtual universe where they have complete creative control.

The consequence is that many players use Minecraft as a tool for design rather than playing it as a traditional computer game. Minecraft offers both possibilities, challenging the distinction between design and play. In doing so, Minecraft has inspired an entire generation in the field of design, whether it be a new player considering the positioning of a window for their first hut or a veteran Minecrafter perfecting a tower design for their fortress.

Coming from an architecture background, I have always been fascinated by the potential for the use of Minecraft in a professional context; does Minecraft have a place in the architecture schools and practices of the future?

Minecraft is by no means a replacement for the advanced CAD tools that professionals use, but I believe it offers several features that conventional CAD tools do not—all of which are, in my mind, essential to good design practice. First, it encourages a playful approach to design. CAD tools are currently used to create technical drawings, but they're wholly inappropriate for conceptualization or experimentation in a playful manner. The links between design and play are well documented; play is a natural mechanism for humans to solve problems. And it's a state of mind that all Minecrafters are familiar with; when left without instruction, the player is forced to come up with creative solutions to the design problems that face them in their own world.



(above)
The BlockWorks Team's *Gotham City* (2016)
12 builders | 25 million blocks | 5 days



Minecraft is also unique as a design tool, as it's operated from the perspective of a character. CAD tools most often rely on a "god-mode" perspective: users view and design their projects from above. But when you build in Minecraft, your character must construct the design by hand from the ground up. While designing from "on high" is likely to detach a designer from the human scale of their creation, Minecrafters are experiencing their own creation while designing it, moving through the building as they place more blocks. For architects who are taught to value the human experience of their design above all else, Minecraft's offering of a first-person design tool is invaluable.

Finally, Minecraft's usefulness in the design field is affirmed by its potential as a 3D communication tool. Architectural drawings and CAD models are practically unintelligible to the untrained eye; however, Minecraft is a platform already understood by millions and easy to comprehend for any newcomers to the game. For this very reason, Minecraft is perfect for engaging the public in design that will affect them, including the design of public spaces.

This is already happening through an initiative called Block by Block (<http://blockbyblock.org>), a partnership between UN-Habitat and Mojang that brings Minecraft to communities around the world, giving them the opportunity to design their own local public spaces. The designs are then taken from Minecraft and built in the real world.

Projects like Block by Block tap into the enormous creative potential of Minecraft, and with it, the creative potential of the Minecraft generation. Perhaps it's only a matter of time before Minecraft is an essential tool for community-led design.



(above and opposite)

The BlockWorks Team's *Metropolis* (2016)
12 builders | 25 million blocks | 5 days

(next pages)

The BlockWorks Team's *London 1666* (2016)
5 builders | 30 million blocks | 13 days



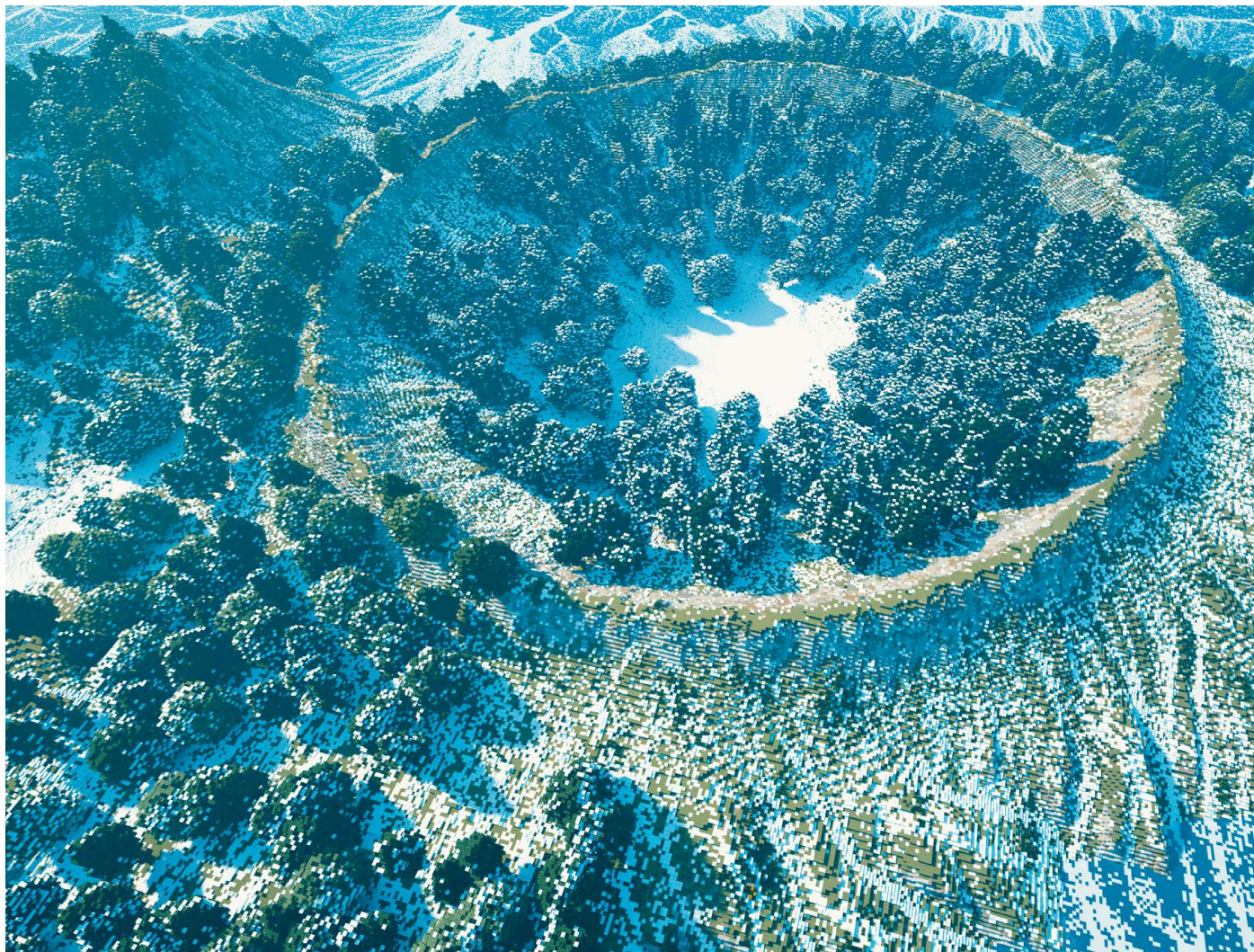




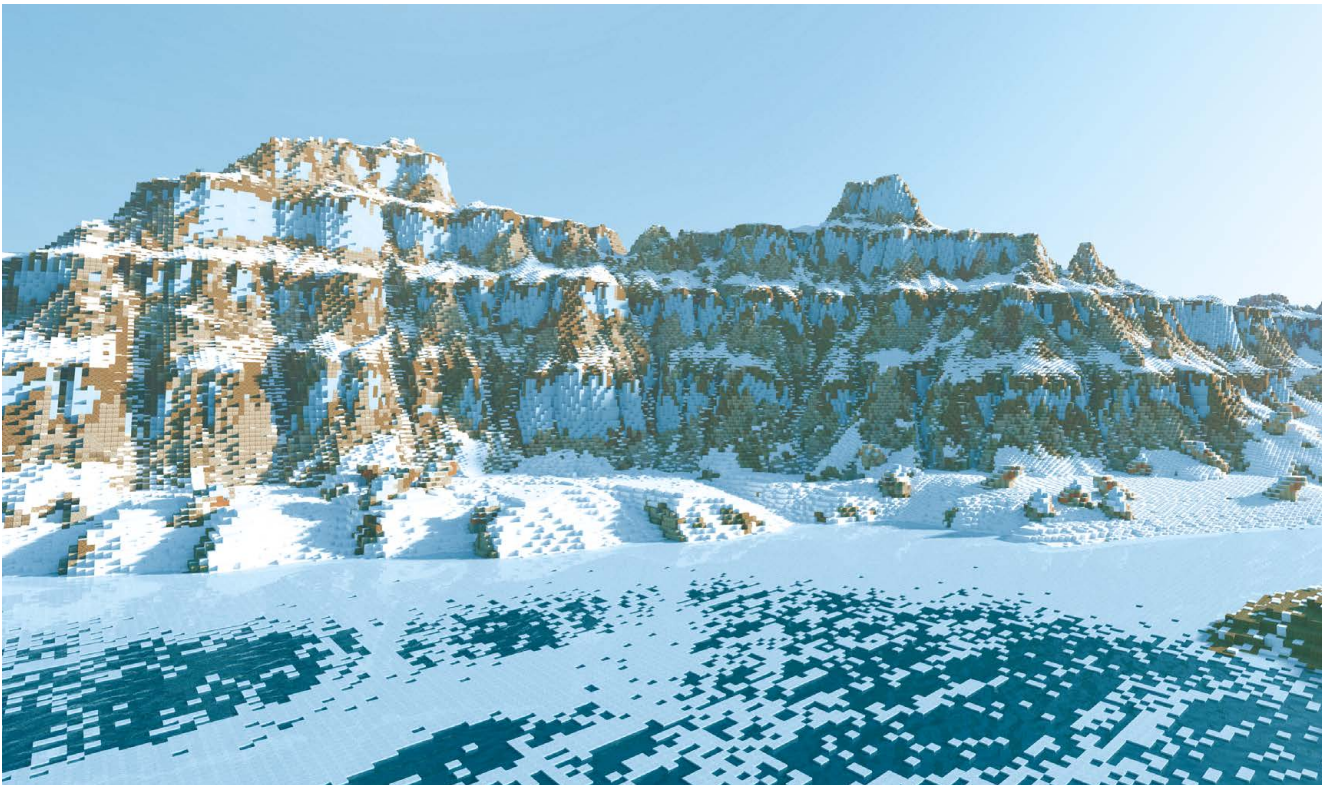




Landscapes



(above and opposite)
Andrzej Czerniewski's *Nolwar - Lands of Winter Patterns* (2014)
1 builder | 3 billion blocks | 28 days



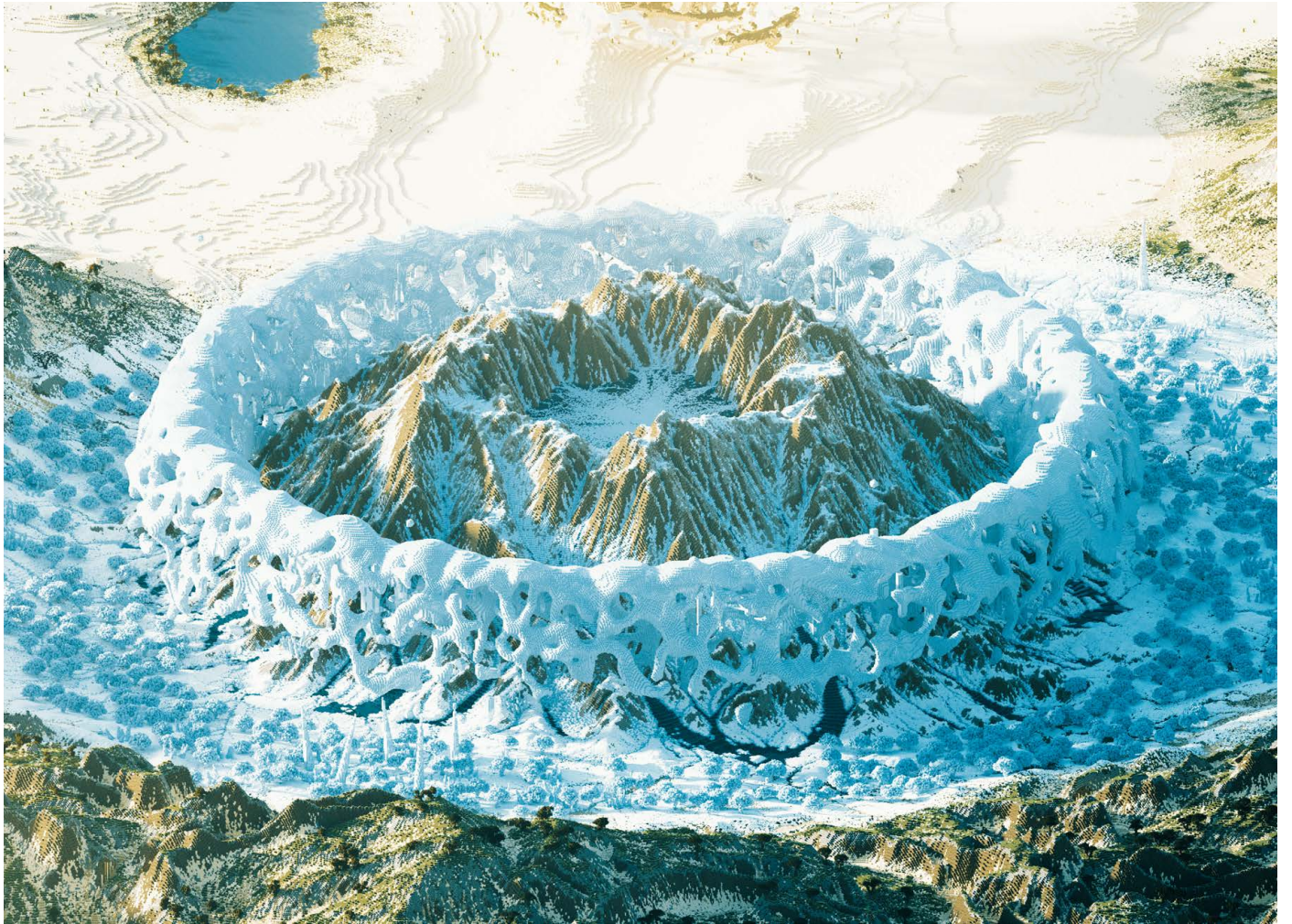




(opposite, above, and next page)
Andrzej Czerniewski's *Iaven - Magic of Colors* (2014)
1 builder | 7 billion blocks | 22 days







(above and opposite)
Andrzej Czerniewski's *Meiva - Dance of the Elements* (2014)
1 builder | 7 billion blocks | 23 days



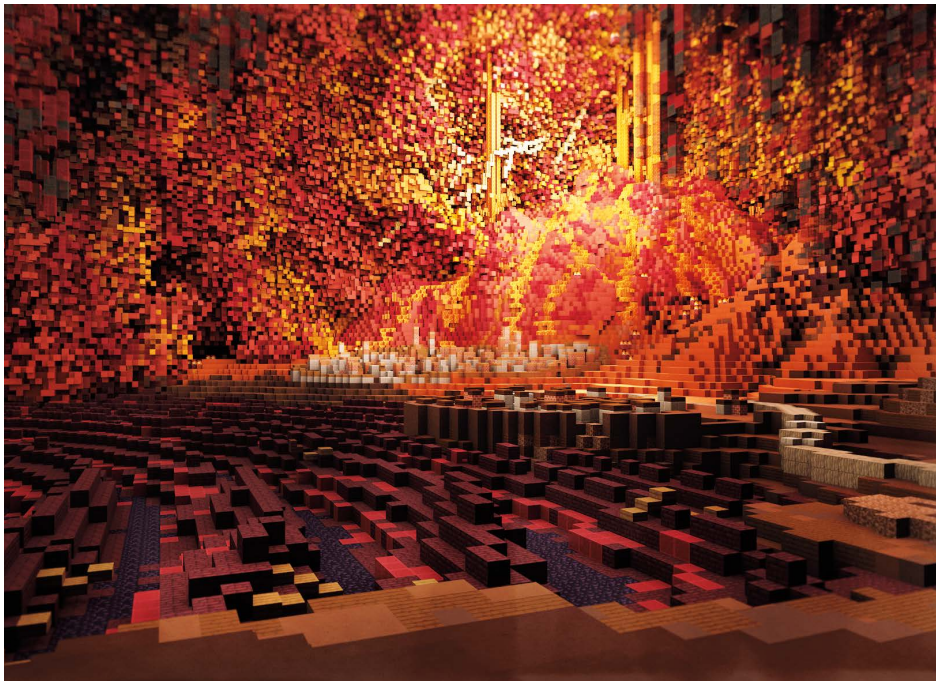




(opposite, above, and next page)
Andrzej Czerniewski's *Phain - Game Board of the Ancients* (2016)
1 builder | 10 billion blocks | 1 year







(top)

Ivan Kozmin's *Destruction of Herculaneum and Pompeii* (2016)
1 builder | 1 million blocks | 17 days

(bottom)

Vegard Elseth's *Fusion* (2016)
1 builder | 3 million blocks | 31 days

(opposite and next page)

Andrzej Czerniewski's *Azorzeia - Gardens of the Wild* (2014)
1 builder | 7 billion blocks | 27 days









BlockWorks

The creations featured in this book were made by BlockWorks, an international team of architects, artists, programmers, and designers working in Minecraft. Founded in 2013, BlockWorks is the largest professional team of Minecraft artists in the world, with more than 40 members. They have built their own custom sculpting and computer-aided design tools to help create the massive worlds seen in this book. Read more about BlockWorks at <http://blockworksmc.com>.

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